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Captain Kyd, The King of the Black Flag; or, The Witch of Death Castle

BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM,

AUTHOR OF "MERLE, THE MUTINEER," "MONTZUMA, THE MERCILESS," "FREELANCE, THE BUCCANEER," "THE DARE DEVIL,"
"THE CRETAN ROVER," "THE PIRATE PRINCE," ETC., ETC.



CAPTAIN KYD.

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THE KING OF THE BLACK FLAG.

OR,

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CHAPTER I.

THE TWO CASTLES.

LIKE huge sentinels standing at their posts, grim and silent, the ruins of two castles of the olden time crown the headlands of peninsulas, that jut out from the main land on the picturesque coast of southern Ireland, and form a small and pretty bay, whose wild and romantic shores and deep blue waters are themes for many a weird legend.

The one which towers up grandly on the right, even in its desolation and decay, is a formidable structure, and commands a fine view of the bay, and for leagues up and down the coast, which here and there is dotted with other rockbound retreats, the homes of the Lords of Ireland, centuries ago.

With its towers and battlements, massive walls and vaulted chambers, its court-yards, and surrounding acres stretching inland for miles, over hill and dale, it was evident that the lord and master who held revel over its hospitable board was of noble lineage and the possessor of vast riches.

Beneath its spacious roof a regiment of guests had found hospitality, and in the long-ago of which I write, their laughter and song would ring merrily out over the waters of the bay, and reach the ears of those who dwelt in the castle upon the other headland, a mile distant, and which was far less pretentious in build and surroundings than its neighbor on the cliff.

The grander home was Castle Cor, the abode of the haughty young Earl of Belmont, whose peasantry were numbered by thousands, and whom he regarded as his veriest slaves.

The other rocky homestead was first known as Castle Crag; but, as its owner became a hermit, as it were, the country folk called it Hurltel's Roost, and this name clung to it until dark deeds done in its vaulted chambers, gained for it the weird appellation of Castle Death.

Between the masters of Castle Cor and Castle Crag there was the bond of kindred blood, for they were brothers; but to the Earl of Belmont fell the title and estates of his father, he being the elder, while to the younger came only a fair living.

And yet, it was not from jealousy and envy that Fortune's mantle had fallen upon his brother, which raised up a feeling of bitter hatred between these two men in whose veins flowed the same noble blood, for Hurltel had accepted his destiny with becoming grace; but Love, the destroyer as well as the builder up of men's joys, had cast its wand on both, bringing across their paths one upon whom the affection of both centered, the one to make happy with a return of a regard as deep and pure as was felt by him for her, and the other to feel, unrequited as was his almost idolatrous worship, that the poniard of sorrow must enter deep into his heart.

And it was not upon the proud earl that the Lady Lenore cast her heart; but upon his untitled and comparatively poor brother of Castle Crag; but only for a few months did his bright dream of joy run smoothly on, and then he was awakened by a hideous nightmare, for his visions faded in gloom and despair, when the ambitious object of his admiration, she to whom he had bowed in idolatry, had proven herself as fickle as the wind, and, dazzled by the earl's great wealth and high rank, broke her faith—at the demand of her poverty-haunted father, who thought love should go only with riches—with the man she really loved, and went to the Castle Cor as the wife of its proud lord.

From that day Castle Crag wore a look of gloom, the reflex of its master's heart; and, while Castle Cor would re-echo with sounds of revelry, and bright lights flash from every window, the humble structure across the bay would tower aloft in darkness and silence, a solitary taper, like a beacon, visible in the wing where dwelt the wretched Hurltel, his life crushed by the blow that had fallen upon him.

And no longer did the horn of the huntsman resound through the forests of Castle Crag, or the cry of the hounds awaken echoes on the lea, as in the time when hope beckoned him on; but, instead, the servants had gone away from his home, excepting two that had grown gray in the Belmont Manor, and a horseman, alone and silent, would ride forth at night, and dash like the wind over valley and moor, startling the belated peasant on the highway, and causing the humble dwellers in cabins far and near to creep closer together and tell weird tales of phantom steeds and riders seen flitting by.

But this lonely horseman was Hurltel, who went forth only by night; and riding at a mad pace that suited his wild humor, until he returned by Castle Cor, when he would go at slow pace along the rocky road that followed the curve of the bay, as though fearful that the one who had forsaken him might hear the hoof-strokes of his steed, and bring a throb of pain to the heart in pity for him whom she had set adrift for greater riches and a grander name.

And when sunlight fell upon bay and shore, Hurltel would ascend the tower, that looked off upon the sea, and his dark eyes would wander over Castle Cor, and perhaps fall upon the fair form of Lady Belmont, seated in some shady nook, promenading among the flower-beds of the court-yard, or, with a gay cavalcade of guests, riding forth for the chase, his brother by her side, and her face as beautiful as her heart was false.

Thus time wore on, the portals of Castle Crag barred against the ingress of any one from the outer world, and the lonely life of its master gaining for it the title of Hurltel's Roost; but, what went on in that gloomy pile of rocks, unseen by, and unknown to those without, the story will show, as it will also reveal how fell upon it the name of Castle Death.

CHAPTER II.

A MAD STEED AND A Madder RIDER.

IT WAS a dark and stormy night: the wind swept wailingly through the forest, lashed into foam the waters of the bay, rolled the sea into mountain waves, and howled like a lost soul around the eaves and turrets of the two castles, one of which, defying the tempest without, was brightly illuminated, and echoed with the music of the dance, for a revel was being held in honor of a year of wedded life having gone by, since the Lady Lenore became the wife of the Earl of Belmont.

And Castle Crag, gloomy in sunshine even, was far more so on that night of storm, while its stern young master paced to and fro the dimly lighted corridor, halting at every turn that brought him to the arched windows commanding a view across the bay, and of grand Castle Cor.

"One year ago to-night she was lost to me; ay, forever lost to me, and to honor, for well I know she is a loveless wife, and that ambition and hope of riches alone turned her brain and stained her heart with falsehood.

"Oh God! had she not broken faith with me I would have been her slave," and he walked from the window once more, and thus continued his tireless pace, until at last, as if he needed more violent motion to counteract the frenzy within, he called out:

"Ho! Cormac, my horse, for I would ride!" Out of a room at the end of the hallway came a man whose locks were gray, and, with the familiarity of an old family servant, he said:

"But the storm, Master Hurltel." "Curse the storm! It suits my humor," he answered angrily.

"Hark! do you not know from that roar, Master Hurltel, that the sea has dashed over the barrier, and is breaking against the cliff that overhangs the shore road?"

"Ay, you can teach me nothing of what this storm might do, good Cormac; and I am in no mood to take advice, even from your gray head; so bring me my horse, and let it be Red Satan, for his mad antics will chime in with the night and my wild humor."

"For the love of God, Master Hurltel, take not that devil, for he has not been out of the stable for a month; let me saddle Lady for you, sir."

"You have heard my order, Cormac, and I expect you to obey; I will be down in the court soon," and he turned into a door that led to his own handsome and comfortably furnished chambers, while old Cormac, with a deep sigh, went to consult his wife, Elpsey, as to the propriety of saddling Lady instead of Red Satan.

Commanding, on the north a view of the bay and Castle Cor, and upon the south and west the ocean and coast, the suit of three rooms kept ever before the lonely exile's eye a grand panorama of nature, serene and beautiful in sunshine and calm, sublime and terrible in storm and darkness.

Haughtily putting on his riding costume, Sir Hurltel, as the peasantry called him through courtesy, walked to the window, and drawing aside the heavy curtain looked out.

"Ay, revel on, my false Lady Lenore; and you, my noble brother; but the time may yet come when the iron may enter deep into your hearts too," he said bitterly, and turning away, he descended to the court-yard, where, by the light of a lantern, he beheld a white steed saddled and bridled, instead of the blood-red and vicious bay he had ordered.

"By the Cross! old Cormac, have you dared to trifle with me?" he cried angrily.

"No, Sir Hurltel," replied the old man with a ready lie: "the bay is there awaiting you, sir; but I saddled Lady for myself, as you might wish me to accompany you."

"No; I will go alone, for, as I asked not your escort when you were younger, I'll not commence now, when you are verging on to three score: bring out Red Satan."

"I cannot, Sir Hurltel; he would kill me, and you'll have to mount him in the stable, for his humor is strangely"—Cormac had nearly said, "like your own to-night," but he checked himself and added: "strangely devilish to-night."

"Tis well; it suits my own humor, good Cormac. Come, aid me to mount."

They entered the stable together, and a moment after the vicious animal dashed out, his rider firmly mounted, and Cormac following, threw open the portal.

Then, away into the dense darkness and storm-bounded the maddened steed, while a yell broke from his master's lips, that caused the old servant to shiver with awe, and echoing through the court, sounded like the cry of a lost spirit, when hurled into the Inferno.

Along the rocky road rushed Red Satan, his speed and temper just suiting Sir Hurltel, who seemed utterly reckless of consequences, although he knew, that a false step of the iron-shod hoofs would hurl him half a hundred feet upon the rocks below.

But, without a stumble the really splendid, though evil-tempered animal, ran on at break-neck pace, until the road wound under a cliff and bordered the bay shore, yet now huge milk-white waves, shedding forth a ghastly glare in the darkness, dashed over the rocky barrier, swept across the narrow highway, and struck the solid wall beyond with a boom like a heavy gun, and, rebounding, formed a surging, seething whirlpool.

Never before in his life had Sir Hurltel seen the bay so wild, or known the forest trees to bend so low beneath the blast, while the roar of the waters was deafening.

But, both horse and rider seemed undaunted by danger and madly reckless, for unhesitatingly, they plunged into the chaotic mass of waters, to struggle, to surge under, to be hurled into the air, to be swept away, over the rocky barrier, out from the shore, and tossing, struggling, straining, to be left helpless upon the storm-lashed bay, with gloomy Castle Crag looking down upon them from one side, and on the other, the rays of light from Castle Cor, seemingly dancing with fiendish delight at the despair of the stern man and the dumb brute.

CHAPTER III.

THE SURF ANGEL.

UPON that same night of storm, there stood in a sheltered alcove of Castle Cor, a young girl, gazing earnestly through the window upon the joyous scene within, where merry feet were dancing, and lively strains were resounding with such right good will, as to almost drown the howling of the fierce wind, and roar of the waves without.

It was a dark face, yet one of strange beauty, with its small milk-white teeth, showing through the parted, ruby lips, and eyes of passionate languor, and in which slumbered the fire of undying hate, or love, whichever might suit her best.

An abundance of ebony hair, held up with a sea-shell comb, a willowy form, indicative of strength and endurance, tiny and shapely hands and feet, and a costume, half sailor, half Gipsy, and you have the fearless, untamed beauty, and queen of a roving race that had their home in a wild, rugged glen, opening upon the sea-shore, and running back into the hills.

Forest-children, they called themselves, and the peasantry gave them the name of Gipsies, and looked with no good will upon their coming into their midst, while some were wont to say that the small swift-sailing fishing boats they owned—for by sea they came, not land—and kept at anchor in the little cove near the glen, were used for smuggling; and strange stories were told of scenes enacted along the coast under cover of the night's shadows, to give color to this suspicion.

But, be these rumors true or false, the strange people continued to live in the glen, on land belonging to Castle Crag, and which Sir Hurltel had granted them; and one of their number became famous along the whole coast, by going out in her life-skiff, one night of storm, and rescuing the crew of an ill-fated vessel that had struck on Ragged Reef, a league off shore.

From that night Gipsy Jule, as her people called her, became known far and wide as the Surf Angel, and she it was who looked so wistfully into the *salon* of Castle Cor, enjoying the dancing with eager eyes, yet, with her beauty and her ambition, building up castles high in air for the future, for already had she felt her power over men, both high and humble, though she scorned the former, well knowing their love meant dishonor to her, and she slighted the latter, for she was proud and ambitious.

On that afternoon she had gone to Castle Cor with a bow and quiver of arrows, ordered from her skilled hands by the Lady Lenore, and she had so pleased her titled patron, that she had been asked to remain until later, and carry home with her some of the anniversary supper.

Safely away in her little boat had been stowed the bountiful present from Lady Lenore, and the chief servant of the castle had urged her to return then, as a storm was sweeping up and would break ere sunset; but, fascinated by the superb toilets of the ladies, and the merry

strains of music, she had lingered on, until the tempest burst in fury, and the bay and sea were lashed into a boiling, seething maelstrom.

But too often had she faced the mad elements on sea and land, to be drawn away from the fascination of that scene within by fear of a tempest, and still she lingered on, her cheeks burning, her eyes riveted, and her bronzed bosom heaving tumultuously with the thought that burst impulsively from her lips:

"And I, too, have the power to make men my slaves, as now those fair maidens do, and—I will!"

As though there was a certain recklessness called up by her daring resolve, she turned from the window, and unmindful of the pelting storm, left the sheltered nook, crossed the court and said shortly to the porter of the gate:

"I would go out."

"Which way, pretty Jule, in such a tempest?" asked the portly gate-keeper.

"To my camp."

"But the road is overflowed: hark! do you not hear the sea dashing against the cliff?"

"I came not by the road: I will return as I came, so unbar the gate and detain me not," she answered curtly.

"I remember; you came in your skiff, for I recall how swiftly you glided over the waters, and, we servants of the lower hall, were all admiring your skill and daring, pretty Jule."

"I care not for compliments, from such as you, Derric: unbar thy gate, for I would return to camp," she said haughtily.

"Thou would'st go to thy grave, did I allow thee to pass, and the morning would break on thy graceful limbs, cast mangled and bleeding upon the beach: return, and see the merry dancers, and listen to the lively music, or, if it please thee more, my sweet Angel of the Surf, be seated in my cosy nook, and enjoy a flagon of wine with me, for it is the red and rich juice of the grape of old Spain, thy native land, I have heard."

"Thy head is turned now, Derric, and thy tongue is witless, so let me get rid of thy company: unbar the portal."

"Not I! never can I aid in thy death, Gipsy Jule," said the man firmly.

"Then shall I unbar the gate myself," and she laid her hand upon the heavy cross-beam of iron.

"No, no, nor will I permit thee to take thy own life."

"Stand back! or my blade shall seek your heart," and she drew from her sash a long, narrow-bladed dagger, and turned upon him with flashing eyes.

With an alarmed cry Derric started back, terror in his face, while laughing scornfully, Gipsy Jule raised the bar, with a strength that no one would have believed her capable of, and passing out into the darkness, said with a sneer:

"Farewell, Derric, and if thy prophecy proves true, tell the Lady Lenore that my own foolhardiness caused my death."

"By our Lady's honor! that girl fears neither man or Satan," cried Derric with a shudder, as he closed the door quickly, and glanced out of the watch-port to see which way she went.

But the night was too dark for him to see her, as she walked briskly down the rugged path to the little creek, where lay her life-skiff in a secure haven.

Entering it, she raised her tiny sail, and fearlessly steered out upon the wind-swept waters, and, though certain death seemed to stare her in the face, held on her course seaward between the two castle-crowned cliffs that guarded the entrance to the bay.

But the stanch little craft soon proved that it was not an ordinary boat, but a life-skiff, the same in which the Gipsy girl had gone out to the rescue of the crew of the wrecked ship; and though its small sail drove it over the waters with fearful velocity, and the spray quickly drenched Jule through and through, it staggered from under the waves, and held on its course unswervingly.

Presently the daring girl reached the pass between the castles, and the waters swept seaward with irresistible force, the tide and winds meeting, and for a moment it seemed as if even the life-boat could not live: but not for an instant did her nerve forsake her, and unflinchingly holding on her way, she now felt that the greatest danger had passed: but no, the skiff suddenly bounded aside with a rude shock, and grasping the gunwale, to save herself, Gipsy Jule felt something touch her hand, and instinctively she seized it, and from even her brave lips came a startled cry, for an iron clutch was upon her arm, and a human face looked into her own, from out of the weird, white spray.

"Save me!"

The cry came hoarsely from the lips of the drowning man, and forgetting her own danger she let go her tiller, and grasped him in her arms, and dragged him into the skiff with a strength that surprised herself.

Helpless he lay at her feet, while the little skiff was hurled about like a chip in a mill-race: but Gipsy Jule had a heart that arose above danger, and she bent to her work with a will and energy that rescued her boat from its terrible danger and sent it again flying over the waters.

A few minutes more, and she had driven through the pass, with Castle Crag, grim and black, on one side, and Castle Cor, bright and joyous, upon the other; gaining an offing, she headed down the coast, and, in spite of the almost impenetrable darkness, and the wild waters, safely guided the life-skiff into the cove, near the glen where lay the camp of her people.

Springing ashore, she fastened her boat securely, and then returned for the one she had dragged from the waves.

He was unconscious, apparently dead; but she raised him in her arms and staggered along the rugged pathway, until she suddenly halted, for a tall form stood before her:

"Ah, Santos, it is you? Aid me here with this burden," she said abruptly.

"Came you by the water this night, Jule?" he asked, making no movement to obey.

"Yes, but aid me, I say, for see you not I carry a weight fit only for a man's strength?"

"You are as reckless as you are beautiful, Jule," was the reproachful reply, with yet no effort to relieve her from her burden.

"Santos, you are a fool; stand from my path, for I would save life, if it yet exists," she said in angry tones.

"Life! in God's name what have you there, Jule?"

"A human being who needs human sympathy and aid."

"Ha! I deemed it a bundle of silks and velvets from the Lady Lenore's wardrobe, as you are getting so fine of late."

"Dare you throw insult in my teeth, Santos, to say I would wear the cast-off finery of another? Stand from my path, or my knife shall go deeper into your heart than you say my eyes have ever done."

He did not shrink from her, but said sadly:

"Why, Jule, what is it that has made you so savage to-night?"

"You stand in my way, Santos, when I bear a weight for no woman's shoulders, and a life hangs in the balance, for I picked up this man drowning in the bay."

"Give him to me."

He took the form in his strong arms, and, with a sigh of relief she moved rapidly on, the man following.

"Where do you go, Santos?" she asked, quickly, as he bore to the left upon reaching the glen.

"To my cabin."

"No, take him to mine."

He hesitated, but she laid her hand upon his arm, and, without a word he obeyed.

It was but a minute's walk further on to the cabin of Gipsy Jule, a snugly-built hut, by no means uncomfortable, and containing two rooms.

She opened the door and he followed her into the cabin, and, by the light of a bed of coals he placed the limp form upon a rustic settee.

An oil taper was soon lighted, and the glare turned full upon the rescued man, and both Gipsy Jule and her lover, Santos, gave a start, for they recognized who it was that had been so strangely snatched from a watery grave.

He was a man of superb physical proportions, tall, slender, dressed in a riding-suit, and with a face that was deeply bronzed, stern, and features strangely perfect: in fact he was one to attract attention in any assemblage, and command respect with admiration.

"Do you know him?" asked Santos, in a low tone.

"Is he dead, is the more important question?" she answered evasively, and added quickly:

"See this wound upon his head: it is where my skiff struck him, yet is not dangerous I think."

"Do you know who he is, Jule?" asked again the jealous Santos.

"Yes," she answered, defiantly, "I do know him, for he was the gentleman who came to the rescue of your old mother and myself, when a band of peasants were insulting us on the highway; yes, he is Sir Hurtel of Castle Crag."

"Yes, the brother of a nobleman," sneered Santos.

"The same blood is in the veins of one that is in the other's, and, from all accounts he is the nobler of the two; but I wish no quarrel with you, Santos, but your aid in bringing this gentleman, back to consciousness—Ah! he is recovering."

Slowly, the dark, brilliant-eyes of Sir Hurtel opened, and fixed themselves first upon the face of Gipsy Jule, and then upon Santos.

"You are better, sir," she said in a soft, musical tone, habitual to her when not aroused.

"Yes; I came near drowning, and my horse sunk under me, and I hailed a boat, but it ran me down: did you save me, sir?" and with an effort he turned his head toward Santos, who answered angrily:

"No, and I am sorry that Jule did."

"Ah! I owe my life then to Gipsy Jule; others are indebted to her for the same service; you are then Gipsy Jule?" and he gazed into the face of the young girl earnestly.

"Yes, I am so called, Sir Hurtel," she answered modestly.

"You know me then?"

"Yes, for you did me a service once on the highway; but your face shows that you are suffering."

He gave a grimace, and answered:

"My head feels dizzy, and my left arm is broken, for your boat struck me hard; but otherwise I am all right, I think."

"Then you shall remain here and I will care for you, for it was I that hurt you."

"It was you that saved my life," he said with a smile.

She made no reply to his remark, though her face flushed, and turning to her lover, she said:

"Santos, go and ask Benedictine to come here at once, for he has skill in wounds and sickness."

"I will not go, Jule," was the determined reply of the young Gipsy.

"As you please, but remain here and I will go," and she glided from the cabin, leaving her jealous lover alone with the wounded and suffering Sir Hurtel.

A moment of silence passed, and then Santos spoke:

"Jule is a fool, and she will love you for what she has done for you to-night."

"It would be more grateful in me to love her," was the cool reply, but it maddened the young Gipsy, for, drawing a knife he sprung toward Sir Hurtel, whose eye never quailed, nor did a muscle quiver, though he well knew his danger, alone, and with a broken arm in the presence of a jealous Gipsy.

"Dare to set your love upon Jule, and you shall die, as shall she, if she raises her eyes to you: I will swear it, by the dead of my race."

"Your threats cannot intimidate me, and I warn you that you had best keep clear of my path."

The calm manner of Sir Hurtel enraged the Gipsy still more, and he stepped nearer, and raised his knife to strike, while he hissed forth:

"Your words have sealed your fate; you shall die, and by the hand of Santos the Gipsy."

Before Sir Hurtel could spring to his feet, or Santos could strike his intended deadly blow, he felt himself seized suddenly and flung aside, while Gipsy Jule, with flashing eyes and drawn knife sprung in between the one she had rescued and her frenzied lover:

"Coward! would you kill a wounded man?"

"I would kill any one that came between me and thy love, Jule—ay, I would drive my blade to thy heart, didst thou attempt to protect them."

"Santos, I tell you I hate you, and I dare thee to come on and cross thy blade with mine."

It seemed for a moment that the frenzied youth intended to accept this daring challenge, and, weak as he was, Sir Hurtel, who for his own safety, seemed strangely indifferent—half arose, as though to place himself between the fearless girl and harm; but in the doorway suddenly appeared a form that caused Jule to give a cry of joy, and the Gipsy to lower his head, as in shame.

It was a man with snow-white hair and beard, both falling to his waist, and upon whose head four-score years had fallen; but there was no feebleness in his step or manner, and his eyes flashed fire, as he turned them upon Santos, and said in deep, angry tones:

"What! has a forest-child and sea-wanderer forgotten the hospitality due the stranger in his camp? Ay, and does he draw a blade upon a woman and a wounded man?"

"I was mad, king," said the young man.

"You were a fool; but go; let not thy king, nor thy people, see thy face for one whole moon. Go! Benedictine, thy king, commands thee!"

He pointed toward the door, and the humbled Gipsy glided away in silence, for he dared not disobey the command of the king of his roving tribe.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MYSTERIOUS GALLEY.

Two years have passed away since that night of storm, when Sir Hurtel recklessly rode his horse into the mad waters, and so nearly lost his life; ay, would have found a grave in the sea, had it not been for the courage of Gipsy Jule.

And in those two years changes have come, for Castle Cor has rejoiced in the birth of an heir, and the earl's heart is glad with the thought that there is a son upon whom to cast his title and riches.

And strange rumors have gone afloat regarding the hermit master of Castle Crag, for it has been whispered that another shares his self-imposed exile from the outer world, and that other one a woman.

But who? The outer world knew not, nor why she was there; curious eyes only saw a slender, graceful form upon the castle turrets, and in his nocturnal rides through the country, Sir Hurtel was often accompanied by a feminine companion, who rode with the same reckless way as he did.

Old Cormac, on his monthly visits to the town, for supplies for the Castle Crag household was often questioned regarding this fair mistress of Hurtel's Roost; but he had simply replied that if the master chose to take unto

himself a wife, it was nobody's business, and more than that could not be gleaned from him, and the gossips had to content themselves with guessing as to who and what she might be, and it may be readily judged, by those who understand human nature, that the fair denizen of the castle suffered morally in the eyes of the inquisitive.

After the birth of his son, Earl Belmont determined to make an effort to break the barrier of separation between himself and his brother, and consequently drove over to Castle Crag one pleasant morning, and knocked for admission at the iron-barred gate.

Old Cormac thrust his head from a window of the watch-tower, and asked as bluntly as though he did not recognize the nobleman:

"Well, what's wanted?"

"Ah, Cormac, it does my eyes good to see your old face once more; come, open your gate, and say to my brother that I wish to see him," answered the earl pleasantly.

"My master sees no company, my lord."

"But I am not company, good Cormac."

"He would not see the mother that bore both you and him, my lord," was Cormac's reply, evidently posted by some one standing near him.

"Then my brother refuses to see me?" and the earl was evidently miffed.

"He does, my lord."

"Then tell him that he himself breaks the links that binds us as brothers together," angrily said the nobleman, who was not in the habit of being spurned by any one.

"I will deliver your message, my lord," and Cormac closed the window, while the earl drove away, angry with himself for having been humbled by his brother.

When the Lady Lenore heard the result of the visit, she pondered the strange conduct of Sir Hurltel over and over in her mind, and her heart bitterly ached, for though the wife of the Earl of Belmont, she still loved the master of Castle Crag, and the presence of that fair form beneath the exile's roof, caused her many a jealous pang; but the die was cast, and she must accept her fate without an outward murmur, wearing smiles on her lips while her heart was weeping.

But though the outer world was not allowed entrance into Hurltel's Roost, with the prerogative of an author I can lead the kind reader into the old rock-bound house, and divulge a mystery still unsolved in the minds of those who now dwell upon the Irish coast, and who prefer to believe the superstitious legends handed down to them from their forefathers, than have the veil of romance drawn aside by stern truth.

One stormy night, a few days after the unsuccessful visit of the Earl of Belmont to Castle Crag, Sir Hurltel was pacing to and fro in his rooms, his hands behind his back, his eyes downcast, and his whole manner that of deep meditation.

Upon a divan near the window sat a woman, her eyes following Sir Hurltel's every step, and her face wearing a look of anxiety when his back was turned in his walk, and a smile whenever he faced towards her.

Suddenly he halted before the woman and asked tersely:

"Do you think they will come?"

"Yes," was the low reply.

"But the storm?"

"It will not deter them, for they have no fear on land or sea."

"Nor do I; the word is not in my vocabulary; did I fear, would I do what now I am doing for you?" he asked, sternly.

"Is it all for me? Is there not away down in your heart a feeling of revenge that burns hotter than your love for me?" asked the woman, quietly.

"Let my actions, not my words speak—hark!"

"It was but the wind, Hurltel."

"No, it was a knock—come in!"

The door opened and old Cormac entered, his face sad and pale, and his form wrapped in a heavy cloak.

"The vessel is in sight, Sir Hurltel, and is heading for the castle landing."

A pallor spread momentarily over the face of Sir Hurltel at Cormac's words, but forcing a smile, he turned toward the woman, and said:

"Come, we must be at the sea stairs, as I wish to get a good offing before the break of day."

"I am ready," and rising, she threw around her splendid form a heavy wrap, and entering an adjoining room, left Cormac alone with his master.

"Oh, Sir Hurltel, will you, must you go?"

"Yes: I must follow in the path that Destiny would lead me," sadly answered Sir Hurltel.

"It will lead you to your death, good master."

"Even so, Cormac; let death come in whatsoever form it please, I am ready to meet it; but, get your lantern, and light us to the sea stairs, good Cormac."

The old man turned sadly from the room, just as the lady re-entered, and following her was old Elpsey, carrying a bundle in her arms; a precious bundle too, for it was a wee babe, with black eyes, wide open, and roving strangely

about, as though peering for some hole through which to see what was in the future for it.

Sir Hurltel leant over and touched his lips to the baby face, and passing his arm around the woman led her from the room, Elpsey slowly following.

Along the corridor they went until they reached the sea tower, and there stood Cormac, lantern in hand, awaiting them.

Down the stone stairway he led them, until they seemed descending deep into the very earth; but at last he paused by a heavy iron door, and turned a huge key creaking in the rusty lock, while Sir Hurltel removed a massive bar.

Outside was now heard the roar of the waves striking upon the rock that formed the castle's base, and as the door swung open a gust of wind swept in with great violence, causing Sir Hurltel to draw his fair companion closer to him, and a faint cry to come from the midst of the wraps in old Elpsey's arms.

"There's the vessel, Sir Hurltel," said Cormac.

"Yes, and within a length of the steps; and skillfully handled too," answered the master of Castle Crag, as a small, two-masted galley of sixty tons, was skillfully laid alongside the rock at the base of the sea tower.

With a bound half a dozen dark forms were on shore and one advancing, said politely:

"Ah, I see that you await us."

"Yes; what we take with us you will find yonder in the tower," and turning to the woman Sir Hurltel said simply:

"Come!"

A wailing cry broke from the lips of the woman, and springing toward Elpsey she grasped the infant in her arms, saying in plaintive tones:

"My baby, my baby, farewell! farewell!"

Hot tears fell upon that wee face, and hotter kisses were pressed to the baby's lips, and then the woman turned away, holding out the little thing to Sir Hurltel.

The stern man bent over, his lips quivering, and his voice trembling, as he said in a low tone:

"My child, farewell."

Oh, Elpsey! and you Cormac, I leave my very soul in this grim old castle with you, while my heart goes far away; farewell, farewell!" and, as if dreading to trust herself longer near her child, the sorrowing mother turned quickly away, and with a word of adieu to his two faithful old servants, Sir Hurltel quickly followed, and the next moment the two were upon the galley's deck.

And then followed the line of seamen bearing the luggage, a low, stern order to cast off, and the bows swung slowly around under the impulse of the sweeps.

But at that moment a tall form darted out of the shadow of the high stern, his arm uplifted, and facing Sir Hurltel, said savagely:

"Die! and by Santos the Gipsy's hand!"

Into the broad breast of Sir Hurltel was driven the keen blade, and down upon the deck sunk the strong man, a groan of agony mingling with the shriek that burst from the lips of the woman.

And away dashed the Gipsy after his fiendish work, and, with a mighty bound he sprang from the galley's high stern to the rock, and darted along the rocks toward the castle, while a dozen voices cried:

"Fire on him! kill him!"

Hearing the cry, and knowing his danger the Gipsy, with mighty bounds reached the spot where old Cormac and Elpsey stood, and tearing the child from her arms, sped away up the steep rocks, holding the precious burden at his side as a shield, and causing the dozen musketoons leveled at him to be lowered.

"Cowards! why do you not fire?" Came in ringing tones from the woman's lips, as the galley swung further and further away.

"We dare not! he has the child!" cried one.

"Give me your weapon," and seizing it the woman raised it quickly at the flying form, now a hundred feet above on the dizzy path, and the flash and report followed.

A cry burst from the lips of the daring fugitive, and staggering he fell from the cliff, down, down into the dark waters below.

"I have killed him! ay, and my child too!"

The first was in triumphant tones; the second a plaintive moan, and down upon the deck, across the motionless form of Sir Hurltel, sunk the poor woman, while a fearful gale swept down from the heights above, and catching the sails of the galley drove her furiously over the waters, and sent old Cormac and Elpsey in haste into the tower, trembling with superstitious horror, and wailing with grief.

CHAPTER V.

KATE OF BELMONT.

A SCORE of years have elapsed, kind reader, since that night of storm when the mysterious galley sailed from the sea tower of Castle Crag, and Time, the great consoler and destroyer, has touched with decay the grand old house of Sir Hurltel, for no longer is it the abode of its sad-faced, stern master, but the resort of the night-

birds and any wild beast that cared to make his den there.

Its iron door, through which the proud Earl of Belmont, twenty years before, had been refused admittance, now hangs on one hinge, and the entrance to the sea tower is crumbling to decay, while moss grows on the turrets, the court-yard is choked with rank weeds, and desolation and ruin rests upon all.

No longer known as Castle Crag, or Hurltel's Roost, the dismal name of Castle Death has fallen upon it, and the shepherd afar off on the hill looks at it and shudders, for dark stories are told of the weird old ruin since one day, shortly after the sailing of the strange galley from the bay, a traveler stopped for shelter, and the portal being half opened, he entered, to start back with affright, for before him lay old Cormac and Elpsey, slain by the knife of an assassin.

The startling story soon flew far and wide, and many there were who visited the castle in the vain endeavor to solve the mysterious murder; and then it was found that Sir Hurltel and the strange woman who had been seen there were gone no one knew where, and the master of Castle Crag was set down as the murderer of the old couple.

In the court-yard Cormac and Elpsey were buried, and from that day no one went near Hurltel's Roost, which slowly went to ruin, for the Earl of Belmont, even, shunned it as he would a pest-house, and held in his heart bitter memories against the brother he now looked upon as a murderer and wanderer from his native land.

But, though Castle Death, deserted and avoided by all, crumbled to ruin, Castle Cor wore no look of mourning for its rival across the bay, but on the contrary loomed up more grandly each year, until skilled masons made of it a lovely palace, and turned the rocky court and grounds into a very Eden of beauty, for the Earl of Belmont lavishly expended his riches to make his home all that could be desired, for to the house of Belmont a daughter had been born, who, as she grew to maidenhood, strangely resembled her mother, when, at her age, she had won the hearts of the two brothers, the one to wreck, the other to make happy, even though he knew full well that away back in her heart there still burned a flame of affection for the wandering Hurltel.

As much as Sir Gerald, the heir to the proud name of Earl of Belmont was disliked for his overbearing manner toward his inferiors, the Lady Kate, two years the junior of her brother, was beloved by all who knew her, from the noblemen and gentry, who sought to win her heart and hand, down to the humblest peasant on the lands of Castle Cor.

That she was beautiful, none would deny who saw her standing upon the lawn that run from the castle wall to the brink of the precipice overhanging the sea, and watching a sail far off upon the waters.

She had been amusing herself for some time practicing at a target with bow and arrow, until her eyes caught sight of the vessel, and it lured her from her sport to watch its graceful motions, as it rose and fell upon the waves.

Leaning upon her long bow, which was richly inlaid and carved with woodland devices, her attitude displayed her faultless form to perfection, attired as she was in a blue velvet jacket, and skirt of like material looped up for convenience in walking, yet so as to display a shapely foot incased in a tight-fitting, high-heeled boot, and a hat with snowy plumes sheltering her red-gold curls.

Her deep-blue eyes, exquisitely chiseled features, and earnest, innocent face, would have won the heart of any one, man or woman, who looked upon her as she stood thus gazing out upon the sea, and forming a picture of rare beauty, with the grand old castle to the right, and the stately oaks, and here and there a linden dotting the lawn and forming a background.

Suddenly the sound of hoof-strokes reaching her ears, broke her reverie, and she turned quickly, just as a loud cry was heard, and a voice shouted the thrilling warning:

"Fly! for the love of God, fly!"

One glance and her eyes took in the scene—a horseman and horsewoman dashing along the road to the castle gate, and from the former the cry had come, while he spurred toward her to shield her from threatened death, for with lowered antlers, charging upon her, was a huge stag, the monarch of the forest, who had drawn silently near, and observing her in his domain, had determined to avenge the intrusion with her death.

The flushed cheeks of Kate of Belmont paled, for well she knew her danger; but her presence of mind did not desert her, and she sprang toward her quiver of arrows.

But alas! it was arrowless, for the darts were all sticking in the bull's-eye of the target, a hundred feet away, and the stag was within one-fourth that distance of her, and the horseman, though spurring madly forward, was too far away to save her from death.

To fly was impossible before that winged-footed stag, and to spring over the cliff was to dash into the sea far below her.

Clasping her hands, and with a prayer on

her lips, Kate of Belmont sunk upon her knees, resigning herself to the death she felt must be hers, and which her proud, brave heart, would make her face undauntedly.

But suddenly, when the ragged antlers of the fierce stag were within ten feet of her, and the horseman and horsewoman drew up in horror, the latter to cover her face with her hands to shut out the fearful scene, there came the sharp twang of a bow-string, a steel-headed arrow sped on its way, and sunk to the feather in the huge body of the maddened forest monarch.

Down in his tracks sunk the stag, and, her full length upon the green lawn fell Kate of Belmont, unseeing the tall form that came bounding toward her, bow in hand and a second arrow bent for use.

But a second shot was needless, for the first had been unerringly aimed, as the stag lay dead where he had fallen, his sharp antlers driven deep into the ground, and his hairy body almost touching the fair form of Lady Kate, who had sunk upon the soft greensward in a deep swoon.

"A brave shot that, my lad, and worthy the great Robin Hood himself," cried the horseman dashing up and springing to the ground, while the one who had sent the fatal shaft, stood with flushed face, looking down upon the maiden, and seemingly not daring to raise her from the ground.

CHAPTER VI.

THE NOBLE AND THE PEASANT.

THOUGH the one who had fired the unerring shot that brought down the stag, seemed diffident about raising Kate of Belmont from the ground, not so with the horseman, who sprang quickly from his steed, and knelt by her side, while he took her small, gloved hand in his own, and said sternly:

"Quick! bring me water to dash in her face; be quick, I say!"

"Here is my flask, Lord of Meredith," was the haughty response, and the archer handed it to the horseman, who was about to dash the contents into the pale, but beautiful face, when the fringed eyelids were raised, and Kate of Belmont looked up at the one bending over her, and said softly, while a shudder passed over her frame:

"Ah! I am safe then, and to you Lord Manly I owe my life."

The face of the young noble flushed, but he said evasively:

"I am glad to see you recovered, Lady Kate."

Placing her hand upon his arm she rose to her feet, just as there approached a maiden, of almost equal beauty as Kate of Belmont, and who had been the companion of Lord Manly. Dismounting from her horse, when she saw that Lady Kate was unhurt, she now rushed up and threw her arms around her, crying earnestly:

"Oh, Kate! how near you were to death, and how I rejoice in your rescue; but no, indeed, Lord Manly Meredith did not fire the arrow that saved you, but this handsome young man here," and Lady Grace, of Greyhurst Castle, and a cousin of Kate of Belmont, approached the embarrassed archer, and extending her hand, continued:

"And I thank you from my heart for saving the life of my sweet cousin."

"And it is to you, Kenton Cavanaugh, that I owe my life? I might have known no other hand and eye could send an arrow as you have done; here, let me clasp the hand that saved me, and ever remember that in Kate of Belmont you have a true friend."

The one he addressed was attired as a huntsman, and one in the lower walks of life; but his costume, though not of rich texture became him well, and fitted his splendid form, as though 'twere made by the same tailor who cut the velvet riding-suit worn by the young Lord Manly.

With a face that was darkly bronzed by exposure, there was yet upon every feature the stamp of intellect and character, and in his dark eyes there dwelt a power of fascination few men could boast of, and, knowing him to be the son of a poor fisherman of the coast, the haughty young Lord Manly was angered at the kindly tone of Lady Kate in addressing him, and spoke up quickly:

"It was a fair shot, Lady Kate; but the fellow but did his duty, and, had it been necessary, should have sacrificed his life to save thine."

"I would gladly have given my life, Lord of Meredith, to save the Lady Kate from harm," was the reply of the young hunter, in as haughty a tone as that used by the noble, whose face flushed with anger as he hotly responded:

"By the Cross! but thou art become impertinent fellow."

Unheeding the remark of Lord Manly, the huntsman raised his game-bag from the ground, and touching his hat to Kate of Belmont, said with deep respect:

"Lady Kate, I have game here for the castle, whither I was going when I saw your danger, and I am more than happy to have served you."

"Stay, Kenton Cavanaugh, I would not in-

sult you by offering you gold for what thou hast done; but you are poor, and I know earn your living by your hunting and fishing, and I would that you allow me in some way to reward you."

Kenton Cavanaugh's face turned crimson, and seeing it, Lord Manly said sneeringly:

"Forsooth, he blushes like a lover about to ask the hand and love of his lady."

"For shame, Lord Meredith, to insult one who, not being your peer, cannot resent an injury," said Kate of Belmont with evident anger, while her cousin, Lady Grace, cried:

"Well said, cousin mine, and if Lord Manly repeats the offense I will look upon Kenton Cavanaugh as the most noble."

The young peer bit his lip angrily and his eyes flashed, but he made no reply, and the huntsman again spoke:

"Lady Kate, you have given me, in your friendship, a greater reward than I could ask; may I always deserve your respect."

"By the gray castle of Meredith, but I will not listen to a peasant's fine speeches to thee, Lady Kate of Belmont, but punish him as he deserves for daring to address you as he has," and the angry Lord Manly strode forward, whip in hand, for a lover of Lady Kate, his jealousy got the best of his reason for the moment.

Kenton Cavanaugh turned calmly toward him, as he advanced, and there was a dangerous light flashed up into his dark eyes; but unheeding the cry of both Lady Kate and her cousin to stay his hand, he brought the whip down with heavy force upon the shoulder of the young huntsman.

Stinging under the insult and unheeding the law that one of humble birth dare not raise his hand against a noble, Kenton Cavanaugh seized the whip, tore it from the hand of the insulter, and grasping him in a clutch of iron hurled him to the ground with a force that momentarily stunned him.

"Oh Kenton, what have you done?" cried Kate, in alarm.

"Ay, young man, you have struck a nobleman," said Grace, with an angry flush on her face.

"I have resented an insult offered me, and were he of royal blood I would do the like again; but I crave pardon, Lady Kate of Belmont, for losing my temper in your presence."

"Cavanaugh, you have just saved my life, and, as Lord Manly acted cowardly to insult and then strike you, so I cannot condemn you; but go, or he will take your life," and Kate spoke earnestly, while Lady Grace said:

"Yes, fly while you can."

"No, I will not fly from any danger, even at your command, Lady Kate," and turning to Lord Manly, who had risen to his feet, and stood like one dazed by astonishment, he continued:

"And to you, Lord of Meredith, I will say that peasant though you call me, and noble though you be by birth, I will not shun you, and my home, should you wish to find me, you know full well."

"Ha! is this a challenge, fellow?" burst from Lord Manly's lips.

"As you please, noble," and raising his hat to the surprised Lady Kate and her equally astonished cousin, Kenton Cavanaugh slung his bow and quiver upon his back, and strode on to the castle with the bag of game, the result of his afternoon's hunt.

"Peasant though Kenton Cavanaugh be by birth, he is a nobleman by nature, Lord Manly," said Kate of Belmont, as the young hunter walked away.

"Ay, and peasant as he is, his life shall be the penalty for this day's work," hissed Lord Manly.

"You gave the insult, and he but resented it, my Lord of Meredith," said Lady Kate.

"By the Cross! but you uphold that low-born dog in what he has done, and admire him for it, I verily believe," and the noble became pallid with rage, while Lady Kate calmly replied:

"I admire any man who has the nerve to resent an insult, my Lord of Meredith, and I admire Kenton Cavanaugh more because I owe it to him that I am not lying at your feet mangled and dead."

"By the Chastening Rod! but I believe you love this dastard peasant, Lady Kate of Belmont, but you shall weep over him dead, rather than smile on him living."

"Lord Manly of Meredith, you have gone too far: leave my presence, sir!" and Lady Kate's eyes flashed dangerously, while her lips quivered with emotion.

Instantly the young noble saw the mistake of his words, and dropping upon one knee he said earnestly:

"Pardon I crave, sweet Lady Kate, for I was mad and knew not what I said."

"Go! Lord of Meredith," and Lady Kate pointed toward the highway.

"Forgive and forget my words, I implore."

"Go!"

He saw that she was unyielding, and rising to his feet he strode toward his horse, and throwing himself into the saddle dashed away like the wind; but the curse on his lips boded evil to Kenton Cavanaugh.

CHAPTER VII.

KENTON CAVANAUGH'S OATH.

THE young fisherman, or huntsman, for he was both, passing his time almost equally upon the sea fishing, or in the forests hunting, deserves more than the passing notice given of him in the foregoing chapter, as he is destined to play a prominent part in the pages of this story of the ocean in the olden time when the name of Kyd was a terror to mariners from the Mediterranean to the Gulf of Mexico.

Though scarcely over twenty years of age his physique was perfect, as he was tall, with broad shoulders, a slender waist and small hands and feet that would more become the noble than the peasant.

His face, as I have before said, was darkly bronzed, and his eyes were his most remarkable feature, being soft and gentle almost to sadness in moments of calm: but, when aroused to anger they fairly burned, and his habit, when deeply moved, of lowering his brows, caused them to fairly blaze, and seemingly to emit fiery gleams, like flashes of lightning bursting out of a thunder-cloud.

Carrying himself with the air of a high-born youth, and with his dark, waving hair falling upon his shoulders, his coarse, though well-fitting hunting-suit alone distinguished him as one not of noble lineage; but of humble origin though he was, he possessed an independence of spirit, and pride of character not compatible with a poor fisher lad, and a fearlessness that the reader has already seen exhibited when insulted by the young Lord Manly of Meredith Castle.

Stopping at the side entrance of the castle, and opening upon the lawn, Kenton Cavanaugh called to the pompous butler, delivered to him the game for the earl, and which he had orders to furnish for the nobleman's table twice each week, and strode on round the wall toward the cliff, down which a steep and rugged pathway led to the beach.

As he went along it was evident that he was deeply moved; but it was not by the scene with Lord Manly, or his threat; on the contrary it was because what he had not dared dream of before he now knew was reality—he loved Kate of Castle Cor.

Peasant though he was, and the daughter of an earl as she was, beloved her, and to his own heart he could not longer disguise the truth.

When a little girl he had often killed for her a noble eagle, and sent her the wings, or brought down a splendid stag with far-branched antlers, and made her the recipient of this proof of his skill with the bow and arrow, while in many other ways he had shown his interest in the sweet little maid of Castle Cor.

And Lady Kate, knowing that Kenton Cavanaugh, humble lad though he was, was the truest archer in all the country near, and the best sailor on the coast, she could not withhold her admiration, especially when, as a horseman he had no equal among the young nobles of her acquaintance, and was engaged by her father, the earl, to train the refractory steeds in his stables, while, added to all of his accomplishments he was certainly the handsomest young man she had ever seen, she felt herself irresistibly drawn toward him, though the idea that she, Lady Kate of Belmont and Castle Cor, could love a poor fisher lad, had never entered her head.

Besides, was she not, through an agreement made when she was a child, between her father and the old Earl of Meredith, the promised wife of Lord Manly, the boon companion of her brother, Sir Gerald?

No, the thought of loving Kenton Cavanaugh had never entered the haughty head of the beautiful girl until the moment she felt that she owed to him her life, and then her face flushed with the revelation of the secret her heart had securely held, and in very shame she had dropped her eyes before the huntsman when he stood before her, as proud, and far handsomer than Lord Manly, her accepted lover.

And this very circumstance brought to Kenton Cavanaugh, as he wended his way to his humble home, that Lady Kate Belmont was dearer to him than all the world besides, and he groaned in agony of spirit as he felt how far apart in life his path and hers must lead.

"Oh God! what a curse is birth, if it elevates one and lowers another," he muttered; and, as he swung himself recklessly, yet unerringly down the cliff, and gaining the beach walked swiftly along, he continued: "Curses upon my low-born lot that keeps me from the side of that beautiful being, whom now I know I love with all the passionate idolatry of my strong nature."

"Am I not like those they call noble?"

"Is there one of them with eye as true, and hand as steady with the bow and arrow?"

"Is there one of them that I cannot crush with my greater strength?"

"Am I not a sailor as well as a landsman, and has not my good old father taught me the mysteries of learning until I am their equal, if not their superior in knowledge of men and the great wide world?"

"And I cannot, thus feeling myself a man, and the equal of nobles, except in birth, dare not

gaze on her without reproof; but, low-born though I be, I know that love knows no rank, and this day will I cast off the yoke of a peasant, a slave, and raise my head and my voice among men; yes, I will yet teach the haughty nobles that a serf can win a name as proud as their own, for now am I the architect of my own destiny, and I shall make for myself a glorious title, or fall beneath the ruins of my ambition— Hal! yonder comes before my eyes the means I will grasp: yonder beautiful vessel of war dashing so grandly toward the bay!

"Are all men on her deck noble? No! but yet many are famous, and their names will go down in history—ay, and so shall mine: I swear it by the throbbing heart within my breast!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE KING'S CRUISER.

BACK under the rocky cliff, upon which stood Castle Cor, sheltered by the towering rocks in the rear, and by a low growth of rugged trees upon either side, but open toward the sea, stood an humble cot, built of stout poles, and with the crevices filled in with clay.

Across the front was a shelter or roof, forming what through courtesy we will call a piazza, though the flooring was the solid earth: but here was the favorite resort, in fair weather, of the two occupants of the cabin, for, when seated upon the rustic benches resting against the wall, they commanded a fine view of the ocean, the coast to the left, and of Castle Cor, rising grandly up above their heads almost, to the right.

Often, when seated there on balmy evenings, listening to the wash of the surf, the two humble dwellers in that lowly cabin would hear the merry laughter of gay company up at the castle, floating down to them, or perhaps the strains of music, with, ever and anon, a clear, melodious voice in song, which could not but set to throbbing the heart of one of the listeners.

And that one was Kenton Cavanaugh, for in that little cottage he dwelt, with Dermot the fisherman whom he called father, and such he had ever been to him.

Seated in front of the cot, as Kenton approached, that afternoon after his scene on the castle lawn, was the old fisherman mending his nets.

He was a man of dignified mien and noble bearing in spite of his coarse pants, jacket and stout boots, and a close observer would have said that he had not always led the humble life he then followed, especially when a glance into the interior of the cot showed a neatness, comfort, and articles of refinement incompatible with the home of a low-bred and ignorant man, for there were books in several foreign tongues, a rare painting here and there hanging upon the wall, and a few rare specimens of the sculptor's art, and other indications that the old fisherman was at heart a lover of the refined and beautiful, be his lot in life ever so humble.

"Well, Kenton, what luck to-day in your hunt?" asked old Dermot Cavanaugh, as the youth approached, and he looked up with a kindly smile of welcome.

"Good luck in the sport, father, better luck in having served the sweet Lady Kate, and bad luck in having offended the noble Lord Manly of Meredith Castle," said Kenton, with bitterness in his tone when he referred to the young nobleman.

Anxiously old Dermot glanced at him, and said:

"Nay, boy, you have allowed that hot temper of yours to run away with your judgment, I fear; come, tell me about what happened."

In a few words the young man told all that had passed, and the old fisherman shook his head slowly.

"Ah, Kenton, you have built up for yourself trouble in the future, for the Meredith blood never forgives nor forgets an injury."

"Nor does Kenton Cavanaugh, father; he struck me and I threw him to the earth and would have placed my foot on his neck, had not a look from the sweet Lady Kate recalled me to myself."

"Boy! boy! you are treasuring up sorrow in that quarter, too, for I have not been blind to your high ambition; do not be a fool, Kenton, for we are but as serfs, and the nobility are masters, and we must do as they will."

"I, for one, will not, father; nor do I believe you are of such craven heart, for the words are unworthy your utterance."

"Kenton, do you forget to whom you speak?" asked the old man sternly.

Instantly the youth's manner changed, and he said frankly:

"Forgive me, father; but I was wrought up by the thought that we were looked upon as mere slaves, when we are men such as they are, only different in the accident of birth."

A strange smile came upon Dermot Cavanaugh's face, and his lips twice moved as though to speak; but a second thought seemed to check the impulse; but after a while he said calmly:

"Kenton, take thy boat for a sail over the waters, and it will do thee good."

"I will, father, for I have a desire to get a

nearer view of an armed vessel that has rounded Castle Cor headland and run into the bay to anchor."

"An armed vessel, did you say, boy?" and the old man spoke quickly and with an excitement of manner he in vain tried to conceal.

"Yes, father; but why should it move you so to hear it?"

"Ah, my boy, you little know, you little know; but go in thy skiff, take a supply of fish with you, and the game that remains in thy bag, and board the vessel; then return and tell me all that thou hast found out regarding her and her business in these quiet waters."

"It has been said that a piratical vessel has been seen in these waters of late, father."

"True, true; she doubtless is on the hunt for pirates; but go, Kenton, and I will await thy coming with anxiety."

"But why should you be anxious regarding me, father?" asked the young man, surprised by the nervous manner exhibited by the old fisherman.

"They may seize thee, boy, and carry thee to other lands as a sailor."

"I would care but little, for it would be the stepping-stone from the fore-castle to the quarter-deck, which I am determined one day to tread."

"You dream, Kenton, you dream, and dreams have sad awakenings; but quick, seek the vessel, and tell me of her on your return."

Glad to have an excuse to board the armed craft, Kenton Cavanaugh took up the game, he had brought home for their own use, and with a basket of fresh fish went down to the beach, where lay, keel up, several boats.

Selecting the largest he ran it into the sea, stepped a small mast, hoisted a leg-of-mutton sail, and before the light breeze glided along the coast toward the headland on which stood Castle Cor.

As he rounded the rocky point he glanced up, and beheld a small group looking down upon the strange vessel, which had anchored close in under the shelter of Castle Death, and his heart gave a great throb as he recognized the fair form of Lady Kate.

"He is not there, for I see the earl, the countess, Lady Grace of Greyhurst, and her to whom my high hopes will fly, guard them as I may; bah! I believe I am a fool, to dare raise my eyes to Kate of Castle Cor."

He said no more, but headed for the vessel of war, and was within twenty boat-lengths, when a voice hailed:

"Boat ahoy! do you intend to run down the king's cruiser?"

Kenton put his helm down, and as the skiff swept round, answered:

"I have fresh fish and game I wished to offer for sale."

"Come alongside, my beauty, for you are welcome indeed," answered a rough, but not unkind voice, and a moment after the young man went over the side, his game-bag in one hand, his basket of fish in the other.

Instantly he found a ready market for all he had, and at a good price; but the beautiful vessel interested him more than the sale, and he gazed admiringly upon the tapering masts, the delicate tracery of the rigging, the snowy sails, and the fearless-looking crew, who seemed so able and willing to man and fight the large black guns.

"My lad, you gaze on our pretty craft with a sailor's eye, and as though you would like a cruise in her," said the boatswain who had hailed him.

"I would give my good right arm to get a berth on this vessel," impulsively answered the youth, and with a smile the subaltern replied:

"That would unfit you for sea service; but I think the captain would take you in the fore-castle, and many a youngster, with less grit than you seem to have, has boarded a royal cruiser over the cat-head, and afterward paced the quarter-deck."

"And you think I could get a berth?" eagerly asked Kenton, seeing the path to fame suddenly opening before him.

"I'll guarantee it, lad."

"Then I will return home, and if I can sail with you, I'll be back before eight bells," and going over the side into his skiff the youth was soon flying homeward with a flowing sheet.

But twilight had crept over land and sea, and the group on the battlements of Castle Cor were invisible to Kenton, if they still were there; but bright lights streamed out over the water, and one shone more brilliantly than the others, and from the wing in which Kenton Cavanaugh knew were the rooms of Lady Kate, and her cousin Lady Grace, who was on a visit to her, and the promised wife of Sir Gerald.

Running in the wake of the light streaming over the waters, Kenton Cavanaugh took it as a good omen, and, feeling that he could make better time walking, than sailing after he rounded the Cor headland, he ran close in under the castle and landed.

Swiftly along the beach he strode until suddenly he came to a halt, for down the steep pathway from the lights above, came two muffled forms.

The moon had now risen, and at a glance Kenton Cavanaugh recognized who stood before

him, and doffing his cap, he said with marked respect:

"Your servant, Lady Kate and Lady Grace."

They had, at sight of him, turned as if to fly, but seeing who it was had advanced and met him, and Lady Kate said quickly:

"Kenton Cavanaugh, it is you whom we seek."

He seemed surprised, yet pleased, and answered bitterly:

"How can one so humble as I serve you, a high born lady?"

"Cavanaugh, you are too sensitive for one in your walk in life, and I fear you will imbitter your whole future; but you have served me, and nobly too, and I have come to ask you to grant me a favor."

"A favor, Lady Kate? I grant you a favor?"

"Yes, will you do so, Cavanaugh?"

"If it were to the giving up my life for you," he said passionately, and Kate fairly started at his intensity, while Lady Grace fixed her fine eyes upon his dark, handsome face with the look of one who had penetrated a mask and read the secret revealed beneath.

"No, Cavanaugh, I ask no great sacrifice of you; but knowing that you would accept no gold from me—"

"Lady Kate," he said, reproachfully.

"There is your pride again, Kenton; but I repeat, knowing that you would accept no gold from me, I asked my father to give you a letter to the commander of the cruiser anchored in the bay, and he has done so: here it is, and on her decks there is a future before you far above that of fisherman and hunter, if so you will it."

The eyes of the youth flashed fire, and his voice trembled as he answered:

"Lady Kate, I am now on my way to beg my old father's permission to ship in yonder vessel, and from my heart I thank you and your noble father for all you have done for me; you have made a new being of me, and if I do not win a name and honor, then indeed am I unworthy the friendship you so kindly gave me to-day."

"Farewell, Lady Kate; farewell Lady Grace, for I sail on the king's cruiser, and if I am low-born, my name shall be linked with the names of nobles."

He took the letter, and impulsively Kate Belmont grasped his hand, and said, in trembling tones:

"Farewell, Cavanaugh, and prosperity and honor be thine."

She turned away quickly, and with a wave of the hand to the youth, Lady Grace followed, singing half aloud, so that her words reached her cousin's ears, and aptly changing the words to suit herself and tease Lady Kate:

"So the laird he married the lady,

The lady of high degree;

And the fisher laddie she loved so well

Sailed far away o'er the sea.

"And oh! where would my heart be?"

Was ever her constant cry,

"For now that I've dared to marry the laird,

My laddie will surely die."

"Grace! Grace, what nonsense is that you are singing?" cried Lady Kate suddenly, well knowing every word she had sung.

"Oh, it's only a little Scotch ballad, half mine, half the author's, and about a laird and lady of high degree, and a fisher lad of humble origin," answered the gay girl.

"Tut! tut! you wicked cousin to tease me because I wish to do a favor to a youth who saved me from a fearful death."

"An exceedingly handsome youth withal, nobler in appearance than any titled personage of our acquaintance, as proud as Lucifer, and with, oh! such glorious eyes."

"I will hear no more, cousin mine; come, let us stroll out on the lawn to the scene of to day's adventure, for my father, the earl, has ordered all the deer driven from the park since my escape this afternoon," and linking her arm in her cousin's, she led the way along the path, past the castle, to the spot where she had so nearly met her death a few hours before.

CHAPTER IX.

A FATAL MISTAKE.

Upon leaving the Lady Kate and her cousin Grace, Kenton Cavanaugh walked slowly on toward his home, his heart deeply moved, his brain in a whirl.

His hopes now kept pace with his ambition, and he felt that he had at last taken the first step to ascend the ladder of fame.

In his lonely cabin sat old Dermot the fisherman, awaiting the return of the youth he loved so well, and meditating upon some subject that was evidently of a sad nature, for his face was full of gloom.

"Ah, boy, you have returned," he said, as Kenton entered.

"Yes, father, and the amount the fish and game brought more than repaid the trouble; but tell me, have we much in our box father?"

"A hundred rix-dollars, or so, Kenton; but why do you ask?"

"Because I am going away, father, and wished to leave you above want."

"Going away, my son? Do you mean to say

that you are going to desert your old father now that the snows of sixty winters have whitened his head?" asked the old man sadly.

"Father, I must. You have given me an education superior to that of nobles; you have taught me to be ambitious, and to feel myself a man, and the result is that I shall prove myself one, for I go to-night on board the cruiser in whatsoever capacity they may take me."

"Do you mean this, Kenton?"

"I do, father, for I will no longer be a serf, but win a name that will bring joy to your heart."

"You may never return."

"But I will; destiny will not be thus cruel to me."

"Kenton, not a word of mine shall deter you, and, upon the whole, I think it best, for I am not blind, and can see that you have been allowing your heart to run riot with your brain."

"I have ample funds to keep me, even should I do no work for a year, and you have it in you to make a name; go, and may God guide you is my prayer."

The voice of the old man trembled, and Kenton, too, was deeply moved; but he cast off the gloom creeping over him, and set to work making his arrangements, his father aiding him all in his power, and telling him he would see him on board the cruiser.

Half an hour after, with his worldly goods tied up in a kerchief, half a dozen rix dollars in his pocket, and a stout heart, he sprang into the skiff, and his father following, took the tiller.

Seated upon the jutting balcony of stone, in her own wing of the castle, Kate Belmont saw the little boat put out from the shore, and called her cousin, who was in an adjoining room.

"There he goes, Grace, and—"

"And he carries a maiden's heart with him, cousin mine."

"Why, Grace, do you love the handsome fisher lad?"

"Very dearly, for my sweet cousin's sake; but, joking aside, I am glad he has gone, for I know the nature of Lord Manly too well to for a moment think he would forget the youth; and it was a lucky thought of yours to get him out of the way of your jealous lover."

"I fear I was too severe with Lord Manly to-day; but he should have known better than to be jealous of an humble fisher-lad."

"It depends upon the lad, Kate, and also upon the woman; besides, love is a queer disease, and strikes the high and low alike," said Lady Grace.

"You speak from experience then, cousin mine?"

"Oh yes, for I have loved half a dozen times, and yet I could love but once, when it comes to the *bona fide* article; but see how the lad's skiff glides over the water; he will soon reach the cruiser, and then his path leads him—"

"Where?" asked Lady Kate as her cousin paused.

"He is the architect of his own fortune; he will either become a great man, or—"

Again she paused, and Lady Kate asked:

"Or what, Grace?"

"Or a very bad one, for Kenton Cavanaugh will do nothing half-way."

"Why what a prophetess you appear; but God grant he become great and good."

"Amen! but here comes your brother," and as Lady Grace spoke there entered the room a young man in hunter's dress.

His face was strangely like his sister's, for the young man was Lord Gerald, the first-born of the Earl and Countess of Belmont.

But there was a look of recklessness and dissipation upon his face that marred its beauty and manliness, and one would not have to be long in his society to have it proven that he was an arrogant, wild young sprig, the idol of his parents, and an object of aversion to the peasants on the estate of Castle Cor.

"Ah, here I find you, moping like two old maids; but Kate, what is the trouble with you and Lord Manly?" asked the young noble, throwing himself into a chair.

"He was so rude as to insult a person who saved my life to-day, and I drove him from my presence."

"It was only the fisher lad, Cavanaugh, and whom he believed impertinent."

"And Cavanaugh is possessed of a heart and a brain, and is the nobler of the two," was the hot reply of Lady Kate.

"By the Rood! how you talk, Kate: but one never knows how to understand a woman, does he, Lady Grace?"

"Men are incapable of understanding women, cousin Gerald: at least such men as we meet nowadays."

"Whew! well, I'll not bandy words with feminine tongues, for defeat will follow; but, sis, Lord Manly seemed hurt deeply, poor fellow, and gave me this letter for you, as I stopped at Meredith Castle on my return from the chase, to wet my parched throat with a flagon of wine; but see, the cruiser is under sail and standing out of the bay, so I will go on the tower and wave an adieu; will you come, for by this high moonlight, he can easily see us."

"No, I prefer to remain here, thank you, Gerald," and, as the youth left the room she

broke the seal of the letter, while Lady Grace asked:

"Who is it, Kate, that your brother knows on the cruiser?"

"I do not know—yes—oh God! Grace, it is Lord Manly Meredith," and Lady Kate dropped her face in her hands; but only for an instant, as her cousin sprang quickly to her side in surprise.

"See, it is Lord Manly, for listen to his letter," and she read aloud:

"MEREDITH CASTLE.

"LADY KATE BELMONT, of Castle Cor.

"Driven from your presence to-day, by your command, I obey, though I had hoped that I was ere long to have the honor of claiming you as my bride, and, so believing, I had sent in my resignation to the Admiralty, as an officer in the navy, intending to devote my future life to you."

"But instead of an acceptance of my resignation; I am ordered on duty at once, and the cruiser now in the bay came to bear me away, perhaps forever, from my native land, and to you I now bid farewell."

"MANLY OF MEREDITH CASTLE."

"Oh Kate! the very means we took to keep them apart has brought them together," cried Lady Grace.

"Yes, it was a fatal mistake to send Kenton Cavanaugh on board that vessel, and now it is too late to remedy it, for see, the cruiser flies like the wind, and is already a league away," and burying her face in her hands she continued:

"Grace, I have sent him to his death; but behold! from whence comes that bright light?"

There was now a bright, red glare filling the rooms, and in alarm the maidens looked around them, and discovering that it came from the windows facing up the sea-shore, ran there, to start back with cries of horror upon their lips.

What they beheld was the cot of Dermot the fisherman in flames, and before the humble dwelling a fierce struggle going on, for several rough-looking men were beating to the earth the gray-haired defender of his little home.

"Oh God! this is terrible, for they have killed him!" cried Lady Grace.

"Yes, they have killed him, and they fly for their lives; but they must not escape—help! help! help!"

The ringing voice of Kate Belmont brought the earl and half a dozen servants rushing to the room, and beholding what had happened, they all started off in pursuit of those who had left the old fisherman dead before the door of his burning cabin.

CHAPTER X. SAVED BY A FOE.

WHEN Kenton Cavanaugh went on board King William's cruiser, it was his determination to do his duty in all things, and so act as to soon bring the eye of his commander upon him.

A thorough sailor, ever since he was a boy of eight, he felt no fear for the result, though it would be his first deep sea service, and he stood leaning over the forward bulwarks, gazing upon Castle Cor, and straining his eyes to catch sight of the one who was all the world to him now, even though his love was hopeless.

"The boat is coming, Mr. Lacey: have all ready to make sail and get out of this, for we have no time to lose," and the officer of the deck, who had given the order turned to retrace his way to the quarter-deck, when his eyes fell upon the splendid form and fine face of the lad.

"Well, my man, you have shipped, I see."

"Yes, sir," and Kenton saluted politely.

"You dwell on this coast I believe?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then you should know these waters well?"

"As I do my cabin home, sir."

"Then come aft and take the wheel, for we have no pilot to run us out though we came in by day without one."

Kenton silently obeyed, and, as he took his place at the wheel the boat from the shore touched the side, and the first man that stepped on deck was Lord Manly of Meredith Castle.

It was a source of regret to the young sailor to behold his foe, now in full uniform as a junior officer, come on board the very vessel on which he had shipped as a foremast hand, for he felt how thoroughly he would be in his power; but his brave heart did not quail, for if he gave him no chance to find fault, he would not dare to persecute him.

"I knew he was in the navy, but I had no idea that he was connected with this vessel; could Lady Kate have known it, when she—no, no, I will not wrong her with the thought; but let come what may, my lord of Meredith will not find me a coward," and he stepped to the wheel, as the order came:

"All hands to make sail!"

The vessel was soon under canvas, the anchor up, and with Kenton Cavanaugh at the helm, when Lord Manly came on deck, and approached his commander who stood near the pilot.

The eyes of the two young men met, and carrying out his design to adhere strictly to duty, Kenton saluted; but the young lord took no notice of the salute, and said:

"Captain Defoe, I see that you have a fisher lad from our coast at your wheel."

"Yes, and he is a bright fellow, and I am glad he has shipped with us."

A triumphant light came into the eyes of the young noble, and he said in tones that could ill conceal his joy:

"He has then shipped for the cruise?"

"Yes; do you know aught of him, my lord?"

"He will bear watching, Captain Defoe, though he is a thorough sailor, I must admit."

"Yes, he handles this vessel as he would a pinnace, and I like his looks, and regret that he is not all that I could wish; but you should know," and Captain Defoe walked over toward Kenton Cavanaugh and stood admiring the easy way in which he managed the cruiser.

"Pardon me, sir, but we are going to have a bad night of it," said the young helmsman, who had been glancing searchingly around the horizon.

"Indeed! you must be a good reader of signs, my man, to see aught but fair weather promising now."

"Do you feel a dampness on your face, sir, when you turn it toward the wind?"

"I do, in faith."

"Well, sir, that is a sure sign of a coming storm in this latitude, and a severe one, for it is the spray blown far in advance—see, sir, look at that dark line rising above the horizon."

"I see it, and feel you are right, and shall take the necessary precautions," and giving his orders to have all snug aboard to meet a gale, caused the crew and officers to think their captain had suddenly become most timid.

But rapidly now over the heavens skurried the storm-clouds, flinging huge black shadows over the sea, and shutting out the light of the moon, while a deep, moaning sound was heard, like the rumbling of far-off wheels.

"Lord Manly, I am inclined to like my new man more and more, for he predicted this storm, when I should have retired to rest, willing to wager a month's pay on fair weather for forty-eight hours."

"As I said, Captain Defoe, he is a good seaman," said Lord Manly, significantly; but the captain was now all devotion to his ship, as the rumbling sound grew louder and louder, and the sails flapped now and then.

"She is not making two knots, and it will be dead calm in a few moments—Take in the lower studd'n'sails, Lord Manly, and stand by to hand down all the light canvas, for we shall have it blowing great guns soon."

The orders were quickly obeyed, Lord Manly proving himself a good officer, and then the calm came and the cruiser lay motionless upon the sea, with only her topsails, spanker and jib.

And now, on came the storm, with a roar and fury that meant death and destruction to the brave ship and men not prepared to meet it.

"Secure the guns with lashings, Lord Manly, for we are going to have a fierce blow!"

"Ay, ay, sir," and the young nobleman issued his orders promptly; and nimbly the men sprang to obey, for one and all knew their danger now.

Calmly at the wheel stood Kenton Cavanaugh, seemingly indifferent to the coming storm, but ready for instant duty when needed, and having already discovered that he knew well what he was about, the captain approached and said:

"Well, my lad, you predicted right; we are going to have a blow, and a biting one too."

"Yes, sir; and though the topsails are reefed close, you'll find they won't stand, or will lay us over on beam-ends when the gale strikes, for I never saw it threaten worse than it does."

"Then I shall make an Eolian harp of the craft; stand by the topsail halyards! Lower away! Strip her naked, for she won't need even a lady's kerchief in this blow," cried the captain in ringing tones, and then he added:

"Two steady men come here to the wheel, and mind you," he continued, as they approached, "do as this lad directs, for he knows what is best."

The men made no reply, for they had, with the remainder of the crew, come to the conclusion that the fisher lad was no fresh-water sailor.

Not a breath of air yet moved the sea, and the moaning sound grew louder and louder, and afar off was seen a long white line, the glare of the wall of water rushing down upon the devoted vessel.

All now stood in a death-like silence, the ship lying bows on to meet it, and yet as quiet as a miniature boat in a duck-pond, though the sea was torn into fury only a mile away.

"Down on the deck all!" suddenly shouted the captain, and the next minute the bows sprang into the air as it were, and the wind and waves, with a terrific roar, burst like a deluge upon the stanch cruiser.

And then, amid the shrieking winds, was heard the despairing cry of those who were torn from their holds upon the rigging and guns, and swept away upon the sea to die.

All who had been standing when the shock came, were thrown down, and for a moment it seemed as though the vessel was being riven in pieces, for the cracking of spars, the shrieking of the winds, and the heavy wash of the waters were appalling.

Lashed in the main rigging Captain Defoe issued his orders, to have them hurried away upon the tempest, and the vessel was driving along at a frightful velocity, having been twirled around like a feather.

Glancing aloft the captain saw that his main top-gallant-mast was gone, and that the fore-top-mast was tottering, and an effort must be made to save it.

"Ho there, forward!"

"Ay, ay, sir!" shouted the crew in chorus.

"I want a bold lad to go aloft with a rope and fish that fore-top-mast," shouted the captain in stentorian tones.

But not a man moved, although every eye glanced upward and saw that to save the stick, prompt action was needed.

"Up, lads, some of you, or she'll come down like an arrow and go through our decks; who wants a year's pay for the act?"

Half a dozen men sprung at this offer, and a more furious blast coming at the instant swept three of them away upon the seething waves.

"By Heaven!" it still holds, but it won't do so long; what officer wants promotion for this work?" called out Captain Defoe, seeing that the crew would not move again.

Lord Manly at once sprung forward, and was creeping toward the rigging, when a huge wave boarded the vessel, and sweeping aft with terrific force, dragged him from his hold on a gun-lashing, and bore him, with several others, rapidly astern.

In vain did he clutch at the ratlines, and all else that presented an obstacle to cling to; the wave was irresistible, and swept mercilessly on.

"Hold hard all! now men I'll risk it!"

It was Kenton Cavanaugh that spoke, and he addressed his two comrades at the wheel, while, with a stout rope around his waist he sprung to leeward, and as Lord Manly was being hurled over the bulwark, helpless and despairing, he threw his arms tightly around him.

Then came a fearful jerk, as the rope tightened, but it held firmly, and grasping it, the two young men dragged themselves back to the quarter-deck in safety, while a wild cheer went up from the crew who had seen the daring act of Kenton Cavanaugh.

"Kenton, you have—" began Lord Manly, earnestly, but the youth interrupted with:

"Ay, ay, sir; I must save that topmast now, for it won't last long," and he sprung into the waist, while Captain Defoe shouted:

"You have won an epaulet, my lad, by that act, but why have you left the wheel?"

"To save the spar, sir," shouted Kenton, above the storm.

"Bravo! if man can do it, you will," cried the captain, and, with a coil of lashing upon his arm, the youth sprung into the weather rigging.

Every eye was upon him, as slowly, and with great difficulty he ascended the ratlines, for the pressure of the gale against him was fearful, but step by step he went up until he gained the top, and ascending to the wounded spar, proceeded, with the utmost coolness and intrepidity to secure the mast, so that should it pitch loose it would not come down and drive through the deck.

As calmly as though in a calm, he worked, every eye watching him anxiously, for the ship was pitching and rolling terribly, and they feared to see him hurled to the deck, but at last his task was completed, and he seized a stay and descended to the deck, amid the wild cheers of the crew.

"Gallantly done, my lad; the epaulet you won for saving Lord Manly shall have a companion on the other shoulder;* you are a brave youth, and will be an honor to any quarter-deck," cried Captain Defoe, and, at his words a proud smile lighted up Kenton Cavanaugh's face; but he said quietly:

"She'll bear her jib and spanker close-reefed; sir, and then we can steady her with the wheel."

"You are right," and Captain Defoe gave the necessary orders to set the sail, as the gale had blown its rudest blasts, and Kenton Cavanaugh crept aft and resumed his place at the wheel.

"Cavanaugh, forgive and forget the day at Castle Cor," and Lord Manly extended his hand, which the youth grasped, while he answered:

"Willingly, my lord Meredith."

"I owe you my life, Cavanaugh, and it is a debt I will not forget."

"Do not speak of it, my lord; I would have done as much as that for any of the poor lads that have gone, had they been swept off, as you were."

"I shall not forget you, Cavanaugh," and Lord Manly turned away; but had Kenton Cavanaugh seen the look upon his face, he would have felt that in saving the life of the young noble, he had but increased his hatred for him.

CHAPTER XI.

THE STRANGE SAIL.

HARDLY had Kenton Cavanaugh returned to the wheel, when Captain Defoe came aft, and said pleasantly:

*It was the custom in olden times for one epaulet to denote a junior officer.—THE AUTHOR.

"You'll get your commission when we reach port, my lad; but, as I am short of officers, one being ill below, I wish you to take his place."

"I thank you, sir; I will do my duty as best I can; but I forgot to say that there is a vessel near."

"Ha! where is she?"

"I saw her when I was aloft; she was to windward, and scudding under bare poles."

"We must keep an eye on her, for we are in a neighborhood where pirates are frequent; I'll muster the crew and see how many are missing, and then get the ship under what sail she will bear, so that, if necessary, we can lay her to."

Captain Defoe then had the crew mustered, and found that a midshipman and nine seamen had been lost.

"A dear night for us; poor lads, may they get snug berths aboard some heavenly cruiser," said the captain sadly.

The increased canvas was soon set, and the vessel drove along so furiously, that Captain Defoe determined to lay her to, a feat that was skillfully accomplished by Kenton Cavanaugh, who sprung to the wheel to execute the maneuver.

As the gale had now blown itself out, leaving only a strong and steady breeze, the pumps were tried and the crew set to work to repair damages.

In an hour's time all was shipshape once more, the clouds were drifting rapidly away to leeward, the waves were running down, and the moon broke out with renewed brilliancy and cast a silver radiance upon the sea.

"Sail, ho!"

The cry came in the clarion tones of Kenton Cavanaugh, and from the fore-rigging.

"Whereaway, sir?" shouted Captain Defoe.

"Off the weather-quarter, sir; just in the moon's wake, and walking this way with a nimble foot."

"Ay, ay! I see her, and she is a three-master and a frigate; no honest craft carries a rig like that in these waters. Stand by, all, to get under weigh!"

The cruiser swung round on her course, and at once all was busy preparation on board; the beds around the guns were filled with shot, muskets and cutlasses were put in the stands and sockets about the masts, and clearing for action was done with a will, after which the crew went silently to the guns.

"Mr. Cavanaugh, I give you command of the lee battery. Men, obey this young gentleman as though the epaulets were on his shoulders, for he shall wear them," called out the captain, and, having witnessed the contempt for danger and skill of the youth, the men recognized him as their natural superior, and at once gave him a cheer, for there is nothing a sailor admires more than courage.

The strange sail was now distinctly visible, a little astern of the cruiser and about half a league distant, and sailing a parallel course with her.

She was a three-masted lugger, or frigate, such as were often seen in the Mediterranean; her three huge topsails were set, and she was plunging along at a pace that proved her a fast sailer.

That she was armed and heavily manned there could be no doubt, and that she was a pirate all felt assured.

All on board the cruiser now intently regarded the stranger, which altered her course a little and shook out her reefs, which caused her to sail evenly with the British vessel and so as to head her off within an hour, should both hold as they were then heading.

"He's a bold one, for he must see that we are no merchant craft; to convince him, Lord Manly, send a shot across his bow," cried Captain Defoe.

The gun burst forth with a heavy roar, and a shot sent a shower of spray upon his fore-castle; but the stranger paid no attention to it, but held on his course.

"His idea is to carry us by boarding, for those fellows are devils at close quarters. All ready, forward, to repel boarders!" said the captain.

As the stranger drew nearer it was seen that she was of about three hundred tons, with sharp bows and broad beam, and came along swiftly with the wind on her starboard quarter, and causing her lugger's sails to stand out as stiff as boards.

Forward, and in the waist, a dense mass of heads were visible, and the moonlight flashed upon steel, while her open ports revealed a broadside of seven guns.

Nearer and nearer came the two vessels, and then Captain Defoe said: "I know that fellow well: we have met before: men call him Hurltel of the Red Hand: but what is he doing in these waters?"

Lord Manly started at the name, for long had he known of the mysterious disappearance of Sir Hurltel of Castle Crag, and heard the rumors that he had become an outlaw upon the sea.

Could it be then, he thought, that the strange vessel was commanded by the brother of the Earl of Belmont?

And Kenton Cavanaugh too heard the words of Captain Defoe, and he too remembered how twenty years before Sir Hurltel had left his

home to go to ruin, and the discovery of the bodies of old Cormac and Elpsey by a traveler.

"Can the commander of yonder vessel be the uncle of Lady Kate?" was his thought.

"I see the chief now," continued Captain Defoe, glancing through his glass. "He is the same; a tall, gray-bearded man, with broad shoulders, and dressed like a Turk; see, Mr. Cavanaugh, he is standing by the helmsman."

Kenton took the glass and turned it upon the pirate chief, and at once, even at that distance, was he struck with the resemblance to the Earl of Belmont, for the moon shining directly in his face, revealed every feature distinctly.

"Will you allow me to look, please?" asked Lord Manly, as Kenton silently returned the glass to his captain.

Leveling it, he fairly started, for in the great dining-hall of Castle Cor hung a full length portrait of Sir Hurltel, and, excepting that the pirate chief seemed much older, for he had gray hair and moustachios, there was a striking similarity, for the face wore the same look of sadness in the eyes and sternness on the mouth.

"Captain Defoe, when I was a very little boy, Sir Hurltel, the brother of the Earl of Belmont, lived in the ruined castle, under the shadow of which you anchored yesterday, and he led a hermit life."

"One day a stranger entered the castle, and found its servants slain, its master gone, and not a soul in it, and strange stories were told of the old place and the murder committed there, while suspicions turned both upon Sir Hurltel, and a band of Gipsy sailors who camped near on the coast, but who suddenly disappeared about the time with the lord of Castle Crag: now yonder chief is Sir Hurltel, the brother of Belmont's earl."

"It may be, Lord Manly, for I have also heard rumors of the earl's brother having turned pirate; but be he whom he may, he has twice beaten me off before, and has the courage of a tiger; once, in the Grecian Archipelago, I boarded him, on that same lugger, and he drove us back to our decks with heavy loss; but I would give much to capture him to-night, even if he were a brother of King Billy!"

Silently the dark hull of the pirate drew nearer and nearer, until it was evident that the chief intended to board the cruiser, now that the sea had gone down, and the wind was light.

"See, the old chief is giving orders to prepare for boarding; a shot, Lord Manly, into that dense mass forward, will shake them up considerably."

The shot was fired, and a crashing of timbers followed, with curses and the groans of wounded men, and in a dozen different tongues, which at once betrayed the character of the vessel, even if Captain Defoe had not before recognized her.

"Now stand by for a broadside!" shouted the captain.

"All ready, sir!"

"Starboard your helm!"

"Starboard 'tis, sir!"

"Steady! let him have it—fire!"

The shock was a terrible one, and it spread death and confusion on board the lugger; but, cool and commanding stood the pirate chief, and all on board distinctly heard his ringing orders:

"Boarders ahoy! we want that craft, men, so don't hurt her with iron: now lay her alongside! boarders all!"

The pirate, which had been threatening to strike the cruiser well forward, suddenly luffed, grapples were thrown, and the two vessels lay broadside to broadside, while over their high bulwarks came the buccaners in dark swarms, their chief at their head.

"Boarders repel boarders!" shouted Captain Defoe, and instantly the fight became fierce and bloody; the cutlasses clashed savagely, pistols rattled incessantly, men cursed, others uttered their death-cries, stern orders were given by the officers, the vessels rolled fearfully, striking against each other with shocks that threatened to crush in their sides, the chains creaked, and the dense smoke and flashes of firearms, made it seem like a carnival of fiends, rather than a combat between human beings.

Steadily, though their numbers were fewer than the crew of the cruiser, the pirates drove the king's men back, pushing them hard upon the quarter-deck.

"Now we have them, and their trim vessel is ours; at them, you dogs!" shouted their chief, and he sprung forward, sheathing his sword in the heart of an officer who opposed him, and gaining the quarter-deck.

"Kill him, or all is lost!" shouted Captain Defoe, fighting like a lion on the starboard side.

Instantly a tall form confronted the chief, and two splendid specimens of physical manhood met, the one a man whose name was a terror, and who had won for himself the title of Hurltel of the Red Hand; the other, a mere youth in years, but a man in strength and a lion in courage.

"Now I will see how good a swordsman my father has taught me to be," muttered Kenton Cavanaugh to himself, as his blade crossed that of the pirate chief.

"Ha! do you, a boy, dare me!" shouted Hur-

tel of the Red Hand, and he aimed a savage blow to clear the youth from his path.

But coolly it was parried, and straightening up, the chief put himself on his guard, for he had met a strength that matched his arm, great as it was, and a skill he had not expected.

"Now at ye, young sir, and remember that you face Hurltel of the Red Hand."

"I care not if you are the devil," was the cool retort, and the two blades met savagely, twirled and twisted like fiery serpents, and then one was struck aside, and the other was sheathed in a human breast.

CHAPTER XII.

HURTEL OF THE RED HAND.

THE human heart which one blade had found was that of the famous Hurltel of the Red Hand, and the arm that drove it was Kenton Cavanaugh's.

Maddened with pain, the chief, though he had received his death-wound, determined to die hard, and shortening his own sword into a dagger, he sprung upon Kenton, who had quickly drawn his own weapon from the body of his foe, and stepped back, expecting him to fall.

But the sudden blow with the shortened blade was skillfully parried, and once more the keen sword of the youth buried itself in the pirate's broad breast.

But still the powerful man, tenacious of life, frenzied by pain, and maddened with revenge, sprung forward with his blade still shortened.

And again Kenton Cavanaugh coolly met him, parried the blow, and then, by a most skillful movement, brought his sword down upon the good right arm of the chief, cleaving it to the bone.

The blade fell from the stricken hand to the deck, and like a statue the chief stood gazing upon the one who had given him his death-blow, and who met his gaze unflinchingly, while all around these two rested on their arms, watched and waited.

"Boy, you have killed Hurltel of the Red Hand."

In hoarse, deep tones the words came from the lips of the pirate chief, and then he fell his full length upon the deck, while a wild cry broke from his crew, and in alarm they fled to their vessel, some of them falling into the sea.

Quickly the grapnels were cast loose, and the heavy sweeps of the lugger set going, while Captain Defoe cried:

"Back to your guns, men, and sink the accursed craft!"

With wild hurrahs the crew of the cruiser sprung to their guns once more, and shot after shot was poured upon the flying vessel; but the pirates, now despairing of capturing the king's craft, turned their own broadsides upon her, and it became a running and hot fight, until one shot from the lugger cut away the foremast of his pursuing foe, and the chase ended, the huge sails of the buccaneer, extending from deck to deck, rapidly sending her out of harm's way from the superior metal of the gallant British captain.

"Well, we've lost the lugger, but killed her captain, thanks to you, my brave Cavanaugh, for, if you had not cut him down he'd have carried us, that's certain; if you keep on as you have begun to-night, you'll be our admiral before I am a post-captain," and turning to Lord Manly, he continued in a low tone:

"The boy does need watching, my lord, and his example is worth following; but now to repair damages and head for port."

The cruiser was by no means in an enviable condition, for her decks had been torn by shot, her bulwarks and rigging were shattered, the foremast hung a wreck over the side, cut off fifteen feet above the deck, and dead and wounded lay around, more than a score in number, while many a brave fellow, able to move about, was nursing a wound.

Willingly the men set to work, and soon order came once more out of chaos, and Kenton Cavanaugh, stealing a moment's rest, as the skies grew rosy with the rising sun, knelt by the side of the pirate chief, whom he had placed near the wheel.

"I once saw in Castle Cor, when the earl sent for me one day, the portrait of Sir Hurltel, and the servants said the Countess Lenore was wont to look at it each morning and evening, when no one was watching her; this man has the same splendid form and face, only it is older, sterner, colder than was Sir Hurltel's; yet I believe this is the earl's brother, but I hope he and Lady Kate may never know that he was really a pirate."

So muttered Kenton Cavanaugh, as he knelt beside the dead chief, and sadly gazed upon him.

Raising the lifeless hand, he drew from it the blood-stained gauntlet, and his eyes fell upon a large gold ring, worn upon the small finger.

"Ah, here is proof; it is the shield of Sir Hurltel, with the crest of his house cut into the stone," and drawing it from the finger, he read, engraven within:

"Hurltel of Castle Crag."

The ring he placed in his own pocket, and rising, sought Captain Defoe.

"Captain, Hurltel of the Red Hand is the brother of the Earl of Belmont; see, here is his ring, and I would ask, for the sake of his name, that he be buried with the service of the church."

"A strange request to make for a pirate, Cavanaugh, for, noble or king, a man as wicked as he was could never be prayed out of perdition by the prayers of all the priests in Christendom; but keep the ring and give it to the earl yourself, and as I can refuse you nothing, bury Sir Hurltel with a prayer."

"Thank you, Captain Defoe."

"But who is to do the praying, Cavanaugh, for I confess I am not up in such things, and I guess my prayers would never reach the Great Admiral aloft, and we have no one on board who knows about such things."

"I will recite the service, sir, for I know it by heart."

"Do so, then, and bring our dead, too, within the bowlines; but give the poor lads the benefit first, so they'll get a start of the bloody pirate, and we'll sink them to windward, and drop the old fellow over to leeward, and that will give them another advantage over the red-handed wretch."

Kenton smiled at the words of his captain, and slipping the ring upon his own finger, went forward and gave orders for the burial.

The dead chief was sewn up in canvas, a heavy shot attached to his feet, and the body laid on the lee side of the deck, while the dead men of his crew were thrown unceremoniously into the ocean.

Then the dead officer and crew of the cruiser were prepared for their watery grave in like manner as was Hurltel of the Red Hand, and all hands were summoned to attend burial.

With caps off, and bowed heads they stood, while Kenton Cavanaugh, in a clear, earnest tone, recited the burial service of the church of England, and one by one the bodies were dropped into the sea, diving rapidly down into the depths below, there to remain forever.

At last it came the turn of the pirate chief, and four seamen raised him unfeelingly, and were about to hurl him headfirst over the bulwarks, when there came the ringing order:

"Hold!"

The men turned in surprise, and all eyes were fixed upon Kenton Cavanaugh.

"Men, that is the dead body of a human being, and be he what he might in life, in death he is sacred."

The stern rebuke was instantly felt, and Hurltel of the Red Hand, once the lonely exile of Castle Crag, sunk quietly into the waves, forever from the view of human gaze, but his crimes to live in romance and story until time shall have an end.

A few moments of silence followed, and then the crew dispersed, a jury mast was skillfully rigged, sail set, and the cruiser headed for port.

"Cavanaugh, I intend to put into port to repair, and I will send you on with the written report of my cruise to the Lord of the Admiralty, and you can get your commission as second lieutenant at the same time, for no one deserves it more, and then you can join me at Queens-town, thirty days from this."

Kenton Cavanaugh's face flushed with pride, for his dreams of ambition and fame were being rapidly realized, and he said earnestly:

"I thank you, Captain Defoe: I did but my duty, and am glad of your praise; but, sir, if you remember last night, when we sailed, we saw a fire on the shore, and I told you that it was my own home?"

"Yes."

"Well, sir, my father dwelt there alone, and I am most anxious regarding his safety, and would request that I can visit my home ere I return."

"Assuredly: I gave you thirty days, thinking you would like a week or two to see the sights in London."

"No, sir, my father and myself have sailed there several times; I would rather spend that time at home."

"As you please, Cavanaugh; the report will be ready as soon as we reach port, and you can start at once; and, by the way, I will tell Lord Manly, as he may wish to send some word home, for you go near Castle Meredith, I believe?"

"Within three leagues, sir."

But Lord Manly said he would not trouble Kenton Cavanaugh, as he was just going to London, but would post a letter as soon as they reached port, and it would arrive sooner at Castle Meredith.

The next day the cruiser reached her haven, and, armed with his official dispatches Kenton Cavanaugh went ashore, accompanied by Lord Manly, who was to return with the boat.

At the mail dispatch office the two young men separated, Lord Manly grasping the hand of Kenton warmly, and wishing him every success; but as he walked alone back to the landing where the boat awaited him, he muttered in a triumphant tone:

"Instead of a smile from Lady Kate of Castle Cor, my proud fisher lad, you will find Death to welcome you, if I mistake not, and my letter goes straight."

CHAPTER XIII.

GLAD TIDINGS AND SAD TIDINGS.

WHEN the Earl of Belmont and his servants reached the beach, they found there the body of Dermot Cavanaugh, the old fisherman, with several ghastly wounds in his breast to show what had killed him.

The humble, though comfortable home had burned to ashes, and the assassins and incendiaries had fled; hot pursuit instantly commenced, yet without avail, for who they were, or from whence they had come, no one knew, and a mystery hung over the scene, as it did over Castle Death.

Pained deeply at what had happened, Lady Kate and Lady Grace both urged the earl to do all in his power to find the murderers, and he spared no expense to do so; but days went by and not the slightest clew to the guilty ones could be found.

One afternoon, some two weeks after the death of old Dermot, Lady Kate and her cousin went out for a ride on horseback, accompanied only by a groom.

A favorite place for them to visit was an old chapel, rapidly crumbling to ruin, and from which a grand view of the ocean and inland was visible.

Reaching a halting-place they left their horses with the servant, and wandered on foot to the spot where they loved to sit and view the scene to seaward and landward.

Not far away ran the high road, and far in the distance, rising over the crest of the hill, they saw a horseman coming leisurely along.

Presently, he drew near the ruined chapel, and halting, gazed upon the scene with evident admiration.

His face was turned away from the two maidens, yet they saw that he was attired in uniform, wore a cloak hanging from his shoulders, and sat his steed like a thorough horseman.

And as they looked, from their position a hundred yards away, they saw two men on foot cautiously approach the rider, who, unconscious of their presence, still gazed at the beautiful scene stretched out for miles around him.

Cautiously, noiselessly they approached, one of them carrying a musket; and then, even the two maidens knew that some crime was intended, and utterly fearless, Lady Kate called out loudly, to warn the horseman of danger.

Her clear voice reached his ears, and he turned, just as the man with the gun leveled and fired.

The report, a puff of smoke, a startled neigh, and the animal ridden by the stranger fell in his tracks, while the two men rushed upon the fallen rider.

But, though taken wholly by surprise he was not unnerved, and in an instant was upon his feet, his sword drawn.

To strike down the nearest man with a sweeping blow of his blade, and spring upon the second was an instant's work, while with the musket he wrenched from his hand, he felled him to the earth, his skull cracking under the fearful blow.

"Well, that was a narrow escape, and it causes me to foot it the rest of the way, for my poor horse is dead; but whose warning cry was that, and certainly in a woman's voice," and the man looked around him; but seeing no one in sight, continued, while he bent over the man who had fired upon him:

"These fellows don't look like footpads; but what else than robbery can have been their motive in attacking me—oh, I know this one now; he was once a servant at Meredith Castle, and he is the very one whose name I saw on the letter which Lord Manly posted two weeks ago."

Thrusting his hand into the pocket of the dead man, he withdrew it quickly, saying in a low tone:

"And here is the very letter."

The seal was broken, yet bore the Meredith crest, and opening it, the face of Kenton Cavanaugh became deadly pale as he read half-aloud:

"DENNIS DALY:

"On sailing from the bay I saw by the flames of old Dermot's cot that your work was well done; but the one to whose life you were to put an end, was the cruiser, having unfortunately shipped that afternoon."

"But that one returns home in a few days, and then the work must be thoroughly done; he will return by the northern highway, leading by Castle Cor, and on horseback, instead of by coach, so be sure."

"The ruined chapel will be a good place to lie in wait for him, and when I learn that you have finished him, I will send you the one hundred pounds, besides what I promised you."

"Be discreet, courageous, and keep wine out of your head and all will go well; but make a miss, and I would not give a farthing for your life, or that of your accomplice."

"Destroy this letter as soon as read, and you have done the work, come to me."

There was no signature to the letter, but what need was there for any? The crest told the writer's name, if the letter had not done so.

"Well, Mister Dennis Daly, you made the miss, my noble lord warned you against, and neither you or your accomplice are worth a farthing now; but who would believe man could be so base, as I have found out Lord Manly of Meredith to be; well, a day of reckon-

ing will yet come between him and me, for I owe him debts that must be paid; now I will hasten on, and see if my poor old father escaped from these devils' hands— Ha!"

The exclamation was caused by seeing before him Kate Belmont and Lady Grace, and there was surprise, mingled with anxiety, upon the face of each, when they saw who it was that stood before them.

"Cavanaugh! is it you indeed?"

"Yes, Lady Kate, it is your humble servant, Kenton Cavanaugh," and he doffed his gold-braided naval cap.

"I feared evil had befallen you, when you sailed in the same vessel, on which, we afterward discovered, Lord Manly went as an officer; thank God you returned in safety."

"It nearly happened otherwise, Lady Kate," and the young man pointed to the dead bodies of his intended assassins.

"So we saw; but your coolness and courage saved you; it was I that called to you, when the men were creeping upon you."

"Then you have returned the debt you owe me, for that cry startled the men, and saved my life; but, lady, as I am anxious indeed, regarding my old father, having seen our cot on fire as we went seaward, will you pardon me if I ask you if you have seen him of late?"

Kate Belmont's eyes filled with tears, and her voice trembled, as she answered:

"Cavanaugh, your father is dead."

"Dead! my poor old father dead?" and the proud head was bowed in grief.

"Yes," spoke Lady Grace, "and by the same hands, I now feel convinced, that attempted your life a moment ago. Cavanaugh, these men at our feet had a master over them, to cause them to take the life of your father and attempt your own."

"True, lady; with you I believe such to be the case; but I knew not that I had enemies; at least more than one."

"And beware of that one," said Lady Grace earnestly, while Kate Belmont put forth her hand, feelingly remarking:

"You have my deepest sympathy in your great sorrow."

"And mine, Cavanaugh! but how is it we find you back so soon, and wearing the uniform of a Naval Lieutenant?" asked Grace.

His eyes flashed proudly, and momentarily forgetting his grief, he answered:

"It is a rank I won, Lady Grace, for services I rendered the night I left here; I hold the commission of a Second Lieutenant, given me by the Lord of the Admiralty five days ago."

Both maidens did not attempt to hide the surprise and pleasure this information gave them, and, recognizing in a Lieutenant in the Royal Navy, a very different person from Kenton Cavanaugh the fisherman, they congratulated him warmly upon his success, and calling her groom, Lady Kate bade him surrender his horse to Lieutenant Cavanaugh, and remain at the ruin with the two dead bodies, until she sent assistance from Castle Cor.

The Irish groom made a wry face, for though he liked a *wake*, he did not relish being alone with the dead; but he silently obeyed, and under the escort of the young officer, the maidens returned homeward, Kenton Cavanaugh giving a description of his short cruise, the storm, the battle, and his trip to London, and yet speaking most modestly of the services he had rendered the vessel, and Lord Manly, and saying nothing about who the Pirate Chief had been discovered to be.

Arriving at Castle Cor the earl was made acquainted with all that had happened, and always liking the young fisherman, he warmly welcomed him to the hospitalities of his roof, for the lieutenant bore to him official dispatches from London, and Captain Defoe's printed description of the cruise.

It was a severe blow to the Earl of Belmont, when he learned from Kenton Cavanaugh, that Hurltel of the Red Hand was his own brother of Castle Crag; but when he saw the ring, and heard all, he said, sadly:

"There can be no doubt of it; but Cavanaugh, as Captain Defoe says, at your request he made not the shameful tidings known, keep it still locked within your bosom for my sake; and, his ring, wear, as a gift from me, for I wish it not; poor Hurltel, my brother, what a fate has been thine."

A few moments the earl seemed deeply moved by grief; but then he said pleasantly:

"Lieutenant Cavanaugh, you have begun nobly! you have a bright future before you, and can, with your sword, carve out a name that will cause men to forget that you are not of noble birth; in this castle you are my honored guest, for I owe it to you that my daughter is to day alive," and calling a servant, the earl bade him show the officer to the rooms assigned him, and which were those given always to the most honored guest.

As Kenton left the library, the earl followed, to go to his own chamber and mourn over what he had heard; but hardly had he departed, when from an alcove, hidden with heavy curtains a woman glided forth, and with white face, and trembling form sunk down upon the floor and raised her eyes and outstretched hands

to the splendid portrait hung on the wall before her.

It was the dark face, with the sad eyes and stern mouth of Hurltel of Castle Crag, and as he had been more than twenty years before when he won her love, a love she had never lost for him.

Down into her beautiful, grief-moved face he seemed to look, and with a bitter cry she said in piteous tones:

"Ah, Hurltel! Hurltel! through your eyes now on me, look at me from the spirit land, and let them shine in pity on me."

"Forgive me, Hurltel! and yet I ask more than you can, you should, forgive, being man, and being mortal, for I it was who wrecked your life; I it was that made you an exile in that old castle, and sent you away to a life of crime."

"Oh, my love! oh, Hurltel! if you could look into my heart now, you would pity and forgive; ay, you would see that though I have been a true wife to him, my heart has ever been true to you, and bitterly have I been punished for my crime in giving you up."

"And thou art dead, my noble, my splendid Hurltel! dead, and my every hope gone to look you once more in the face before I died; dead, and by the hand of that noble youth, whom now I cannot but hate, because he took your life."

"But oh! what a fate has been thine—a *pirate*! and my false act sent you to your fearful death."

She sunk over until her head rested in her hands, and like a worshiper at a shrine, there she remained until the shadows of night crept into the room, and warned her that she must drive the grief in her face back to her bosom, and smile on for the sake of her husband and children, though her aching heart should break.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE WITCH OF CASTLE DEATH.

THE morning following the arrival of Kenton Cavanaugh, as the guest of the Earl of Belmont, Lady Kate asked the young officer if she and Lady Grace might show him to the spot where they had had Dermot, the fisherman, buried.

"I walked there last night, and also to the old cabin, Lady Kate; but gladly would I go again, and with such sympathetic company as yourself and Lady Grace, to whom I owe much for the kindness shown my poor father's remains."

That was then where the filial youth went, when she had seen him go forth from the castle late at night alone, and he was raised still higher in her estimation, was Lady Kate's thoughts, as she called a servant to order the riding horses brought to the door, and went to robe herself in her habit and to call her cousin to join them.

Half an hour after the three dashed away, and took the road leading to the grave of Dermot Cavanaugh, and who had been buried beneath a large oak that grew upon the cliff halfway between Castle Cor and Death Castle, as Sir Hurltel's ruin was now universally known.

Through the servants of Castle Cor, the news regarding Kenton Cavanaugh and his good fortune had spread, and many an humble peasant, plodding along the highway, or standing in the door of his lowly cot, gave the young officer a cheer as he dashed by, while one, more bold than the rest, shouted after him:

"Good luck forever to yer honor; and may you be afther marryin' ther swate Lady Kate of Castle Cor."

Kate Belmont's face turned crimson, and Grace glanced slyly at her, and then at Kenton; but he was, to all appearances, unconscious of the remark, though it sent the rich blood throbbing into his heart with hope, a hope as ambitious as Lucifer's, and which grew and grew with each moment of his existence.

Beneath the aged oak they found the grave of Dermot Cavanaugh; and, while the young officer bent in reverence above the lonely mound, the maidens sat in silence, glancing over the bay, the shore road far beneath them, the two rocky headlands, crowned with Castle Cor, bright and grand, and Castle Death, gloomy and desolate, while beyond stretched the dark blue ocean in all its grandeur.

Again mounting his horse, Kenton Cavanaugh joined his fair companions, and then the gay Lady Grace suggested a ride to Castle Death.

"Oh Grace! do you mean it?" asked Kate.

"Indeed I do; we have such a gallant escort, I do not fear to go there."

"Why in all my life I never entered the castle, and I do not believe any one ever has," replied Kate.

"Yes. I have several times been there; and you know Zebel the Witch lives there," remarked Kenton.

"Ah yes; I had forgotten that fearful creature, who they say does dwell in the old ruin; poor thing, though I dread her as the Evil One I pity her, for sad indeed must have been her lot to make her live away from her human kind," pityingly responded Kate.

"She is the old Witch and Fortune-teller I

have heard of, that appeared here some years ago?" asked Grace.

"Yes, Lady Grace, she came from no one knows where, and roams about at will, making her home in Death Castle, and people attribute to her wonderful deeds of witchcraft; she certainly is a strange woman, and, with Lady Kate, I pity her."

"But pity won't let us see her, and I am determined to get a look at the old Sathaness, if I have to go alone."

"You shall not do that, Grace, for I too, have a curiosity to see Zebel the Witch, and also the old castle, and if the lieutenant does not object, we will go."

"I am wholly at your service," answered the young officer, and they dashed away in the direction of the ruined castle.

Reaching the shore road they wound along until they drew near the ruins of what had once been the outer wall that encircled the lawn on the land approach; but passing through they soon drew rein at the portal of the guard tower.

The iron door hung on one hinge, and around the ruin was a silence that was felt, and even Grace of Greyhurst felt a momentary regret at having wanted to come.

"I will hitch our horses in the court and we will ascend to the top of the sea tower," said Kenton Cavanaugh, and they rode silently on after him.

The court was overgrown with rank weeds, and trees had sprung up between the paving stones, while the hoof-strokes on the rocks caused weird echoes to be heard, sending a chill to the hearts of the two maidens.

Aiding the ladies to alight, Kenton Cavanaugh hitched the three horses, and led the way into the grand corridor that led to the castle chambers.

Silently Kate and Grace followed, and all three seemed to feel an awe, as though in the presence of death.

Reaching the end of the corridor they came to a terrace, that ran along one wing of the castle, and here they halted. Suddenly, the maidens stepped back with a startled cry.

And no wonder they felt alarmed, for suddenly appearing before them was a woman of strange aspect.

Yes, a woman upon whom no eye could look and not feel a shudder in the heart, for there was that in her face that told its own tale of woe, of wretchedness and despair.

Slightly above the medium height, she possessed a form that denoted strength and endurance not looked for except in the male sex, and yet she leant for support upon a long staff, one-half black, the other white, and curiously carved with symbolical devices.

A bright, scarlet cloak hung from her shoulders, and a dress of deep black was beneath, and short enough to display small, brown feet, stockingless and shod in sandals.

Around her waist was a chain of gold and silver links, and to one end hung a large red heart, and to the other a key of jet.

A turban of various colors was upon her head, and adown her back, and reaching below the scarlet cloak, were masses of hair as white as snow.

And yet her face was the strangest of all, so deeply was it marked with passion, defiance, evil, and an expression of utter mercilessness to friend or foe.

Her teeth were faultless, in spite of her age, which it was hard to tell, and her eyes were as black as coal, and seemed to penetrate to one's very heart.

With such a creature appearing suddenly in their path, it was no wonder that Kate and Grace shrunk back with a startled cry, but Kenton Cavanaugh said quietly:

"Have no fear, it is only Zebel."

"Ay, it is only Zebel; but why did you not give me my full name, boy, and call me the Witch," she said in a cold, hard voice and with a scornful smile.

"Why say that which needs must grate harshly in thy ear, good woman," answered the young man.

"Good woman! Great God! boy, that name grates more harshly in my ears than curses would, for it is long, long years ago since I have heard it, and—once I deserved it."

Her words impressed all three, and yet before Kenton could reply, she changed her manner, and shouted out:

"What do you here in Castle Death, the domain of Zebel the Witch?"

"Curiosity to see the old ruin brought us here, and we thought, if we saw you, that you might be in a fortune-telling mood, and read for these noble ladies their destinies."

"You came not here from curiosity, Kenton Cavanaugh, as men call you, for I have seen you here before often, when you knew not that I saw you; and, as for reading the stars, or the hands of these fair ladies, to tell them of their future, they had best never know what Fate holds in store for them."

In spite of their nerve, both Kate and Grace trembled, and seeing it, Kenton said quickly:

"Well, Zebel, here is a golden souvenir of our visit, and—we will roam through the ruin and then leave you to your solitude once more."

He held forth his hand, and seizing the gold piece almost savagely she hurled it far out into the water, while she cried in angry tones:

"Give me not thy gold, boy, for I want none of it; but would you learn thy destiny, and hast thou the courage to hear it, come here by night, and come *alone*, and I will breathe into thy ear a tale that will chill even thy brave heart; wilt thou come?"

Moved by the manner and words of the woman, he said firmly:

"I will come; when shall it be?"

"To-night, one hour after sunset; I will be at the watch tower, and await you!"

"I will be there, woman."

"No, no, you must not, you shall not," cried both Kate and Grace together, and the witch gave a malicious laugh, while she said scornfully:

"Do you think even Kate of Castle Cor could make this boy break his word? If you do, you know him not as I do."

"And strangely careful is the Lady of Belmont and the Lady of Greyhurst of him, now that he wears the honored toggery of King Billy and is not, as he was a few weeks since, an humble fisher lad."

"Woman, you are insulting; Kate of Castle Cor is not one to look down upon the meanest peasant," said Lady Kate with spirit.

"Well said, my beauty, and forsooth it is the truth, as all who know you can say; but I will not harm thy gallant, low-born friend, only tell to him a tale that will be as honey in his ears, and, sweet ladies, sometime when old Zebel walks afar, and the sunshine banishes weird specters, she will stop at grand old Castle Cor, and tell to thee the destiny thou two wouldst know."

"We will listen, be thy star-reading for us good or bad," said Kate, and she turned to go, Lady Grace and Kenton Cavanaugh slowly following, while the Witch called out in her cold, hard voice:

"Remember thy promise, boy; this night, one hour after sunset, meet Zebel, the Witch, in Castle Death."

"I will come," and in ten minutes more the three were galloping back toward Castle Cor, all of them impressed by their visit to the old ruin, and in each heart a secret dread of evil to follow it, and a wish that they had remained away.

CHAPTER XV. THE INSULT.

It was in vain that both Lady Kate and her cousin Grace urged Kenton Cavanaugh not to go to the ruin as they rode back to Castle Cor; he was determined and would not yield even to the entreaties of the sweet Lady of Belmont.

Arriving at the castle they found Lord Gerald had returned home, he having been absent on a boar hunt for several days.

Lord Gerald had never been a favorite with Kenton; but for his sister's sake, and being the guest of his father, the young officer determined to be marked in his politeness toward him; but not so with the young noble, who said insolently as the three rode up:

"Well, Kate, I see that you and Lady Grace have secured a new groom."

The face of Kenton Cavanaugh flushed crimson at the insult, but, curbing his temper, he said, politely:

"I trust that Lord Gerald is not one to believe that no manhood exists in one of humble origin."

"I am one that does not believe in entertaining as a guest one who has been on a level with my father's humblest servants," was the haughty response.

"Brother! Lord Gerald, for shame! How dare you insult my escort, my friend!" cried Lady Kate, with intense scorn in voice and manner.

"Ha! ha! ha! my sister defending a fisher lad: I suppose, Lady Grace, you will take up the cudgel in his defense next?" laughed the young noble.

"Not against one who is so devoid of manhood as yourself, Gerald Belmont," was the stinging retort.

"What! this from you, sweet Grace?" he said, quickly changing his manner.

"Ay, and more, for I will no longer be a guest beneath the roof where one I consider my friend is insulted, and though I love your sweet sister and lady mother, and respect your father, the noble earl, I abhor you so much, I shall within the hour depart for Greyhurst Castle."

"Oh Grace! Grace, you are too severe," cried Kate earnestly, while the young sprig of nobility, feeling that he had gone too far, dropped on his knee before the angry maiden, and cried eagerly:

"Forgive me, Grace, and forget my words, for, if you say so, I will even ask pardon of the fisher lad himself."

"Lord Gerald, I ask no pardon from you, for your very words prove it would not come from your heart; but, as I am a bone of contention, I will save all trouble, and instantly remove myself from Castle Cor. Lady Kate, to your noble parents kindly say that circumstances, over which I hold no control, called me away, and to you and Lady Grace, I bid farewell."

In vain was it that the two maidens strove to detain him, and even Lord Gerald bade him remain, adding that he was his father's guest, not his; he was firm, and turned away from the door, and was soon wending his way down the pathway toward the ashes of his humble home.

"Grace, is that fellow to come between you and I?" asked the young noble, as Kenton Cavanaugh disappeared from sight.

"Yes."

"Remember, you are my promised wife."

"Were I your wife your conduct this day should part us, Lord of Castle Cor."

"But I will not release you, my haughty lady."

"I ask it not of you; I sever all bonds myself."

"Grace, hear me, and do not bring sorrow to my heart," he implored.

"I have spoken and you have heard, Lord of Castle Cor; this night I leave for Greyhurst Castle, and there you shall never come."

She turned away as she spoke, and weeping bitterly, Kate Belmont followed her, while, with a bitter curse, Lord Gerald walked away to the stables, sprang upon his horse, and rode away like the wind, taking the bayside road leading toward Castle Death, a place he had superstitiously shunned before but which now, in the bitterness of his feelings, he sought.

CHAPTER XVI.

LORD GERALD'S VOW.

"My Lord of Castle Cor, whither dost thou ride?"

The speaker stepped from behind a rock, and her sudden appearance startled both steed and rider, for Lord Gerald had kept on until within a stone's throw of Castle Death, and Zebel the Witch had come like an apparition before him.

"Curse you, thou hag of Satan, you nearly unhorsed me," cried the young noble, savagely, for, as the reader knows, he was in no very enviable humor.

"Ha! ha! ha! my haughty and savage sprig, you are free with your curses."

"Ha! do you dare address me thus insolently?" shouted the enraged Lord Gerald, raising his whip, as though to strike the woman.

"Yes, I dare address even you, for what are you?" she insultingly replied.

"By the Cross! you shall find out who I am, and that Lord Gerald of Castle Cor has the power to burn thee at the stake as a witch!"

"Lord Gerald of Castle Cor! bah! you are no lordling, boy."

There was something in the way the woman spoke that checked the temper of the young man, who, in reality, had a secret fear of her, as he had often heard stories of her wonderful powers of witchcraft, and reading destinies.

In silence he sat on his horse gazing at her for a moment, and again she said:

"You are no lord, Gerald, of Castle Cor."

"In Satan's name what mean you, woman? I am Lord Gerald, the son of the Earl of Belmont."

"I say you are not."

"Liar! fiend! witch! I will tear from thy throat thy false tongue," and he sprang from his horse and moved toward her.

But she did not stir a step; only laughed mockingly, and he stopped ere he reached her, for there was something in her eyes he feared.

"Come on, my lord Gerald," she said sneeringly.

"A noble lord should not fear an old woman; come, and carry thy threat into execution."

"Woman, thy sex alone restrains me," he said in an embarrassed way.

"Let that not restrain you, boy; men have killed women before, ay, even innocent infants, and they will again; come on, I say."

"No, I will leave thee; but cross not my path again."

"No threats to me, boy, for I hold you in my power, and again I say you are not Lord Gerald of Castle Cor."

"And again I say you lie in your false throat," he shrieked almost.

"Wouldst have me prove it?"

"Thou canst not, Witch of Perdition."

"And I say thou liest, for I can."

He turned deadly pale, and stared her almost helplessly in the face.

"Has thou courage to hear what I have to tell?" she asked with a sneer.

Nettled by her words, he answered:

"Yes, I fear nothing, woman."

"Except loss of title and the wealth of the Earl of Belmont—ay, and the estates of Greyhurst Castle, which thou dost expect to get by marrying the sweet Lady Grace."

The mention of the name of the maiden, who had just discarded him, again aroused his wild temper, and he stepped toward her, and with his open palm aimed a blow at her face: but his hand was clutched as though in a vise, and with a strength that showed him he was as a child in her grasp, she almost crushed the bones, causing him to cry out with pain:

"Devil! Witch, release me."

She threw his hand from her with a bitter laugh, and said:

"The old Witch has greater strength than the

petted lordling of Castle Cor: but would you hear what I have to tell you?"

"I have told you yes," he answered, nursing his aching hand.

"Thou wouldst know why I say that thou art not Lord Gerald of Castle Cor?"

"Again I say yes."

"I will tell thee, boy: dost remember one called Donald Cameron, a Scotchman?"

"Yes, he was my father's secretary."

"True: and his wife, dost thou remember her?"

"Yes; she was my mother's cousin."

"Well, Donald Cameron was thy father, and his wife, Agnes, was thy mother."

"Now, indeed, I know that thou liest."

"I have not finished my story, boy: I have but told thee who were thy parents, and now I will prove it."

"Thou canst not, Witch."

"Listen: hast thou heard that the very night that the Lady Lenore gave birth to a child, Agnes Cameron did also?"

"Yes, her child, a little girl, was born dead."

"There you are mistaken: the Lady Lenore's child, a little girl, was born dead, and fearing for the health of the countess, and that he would have no heir to his proud name and wealth, and his brother Hurltel would become the Earl of Belmont in case of his death, the man you believe your father, exchanged his dead girl for Donald Cameron's live boy."

"This is false! false as perdition."

"Listen: you were that boy, and consequently you are not the real heir to Castle Cor and the title of Earl of Belmont."

"Woman! Witch! or whatever you are, you have no proof of this."

"I have: Donald Cameron and his wife were bribed by your father to this act, and, with the vast sum he gave them, they sailed for America; but after long years' stay in the New World, and remaining childless, they determined to return to Ireland, give up the bribe money, for they had been prosperous, and claim you, their boy."

"And why have they not done so?" sneered the young man.

"Because they are dead."

"Dead! oh yes, I remember they went down at sea in crossing the ocean."

"They did not: they were captured by Hurltel of the Red Hand, and Donald was severely wounded, and died some days after, but not until he had made a written confession of what I have told you, while his wife dying soon after of a broken heart, made the same statement upon her death-bed."

"How know you this, woman?"

"I hold the two confessions; and more, the nurse, who cared for the countess and Agnes Cameron in their illness, yet lives, and I have seen her."

"Ha! and she told—"

"She told me only what a message to her caused her to divulge, for a fearful oath, and a golden bribe, with the thought that she was doing no great wrong, kept her tongue silent."

"And you are that nurse?"

"It matters not who, or what I am; I have the proof of what I say, and I can bring your proud head down in the dust, boy."

"Does my mother know of this?"

"If you mean by your mother, the Countess of Belmont, I will say no; she believes you her child, for she was unconscious when the exchange was made by the nurse and your father, and with the consent of Donald and Agnes Cameron."

"And they, that is those who you say are my parents, are dead?"

"They are."

"And the earl, the nurse and yourself—if you are not the nurse—alone know this secret?"

"That is all."

Forgetting his last attack upon her, the youth turned, and dropping his hand in his bosom half drew a dagger; but meeting her eyes, he hesitated, and she said sneeringly:

"Beware, boy, for I can kill you if so I will; I have told you the truth, and I have proof; but I would not betray you, if you will do one thing."

"And that is—?"

"I have told you that your father was killed by Hurltel of the Red Hand, and your mother died of a broken heart, so you have cause to hate their murderer."

"True, if what you have said is not false."

"I too have cause to hate him, and the secret shall never find the light, and you may live and die as Earl of Belmont, if you will hunt down, slay, and bring me proof of the death of Hurltel of the Red Hand."

"But how can I, woman?"

"Your father—that is the Earl of Belmont—has great influence with the king, and you were for years in the royal navy as a midshipman, should have good sea knowledge."

"Well, what then?"

"Get the earl to have King Billy commission you to hunt down pirates on all seas; he will do it, and then cruise for Hurltel of the Red Hand, and kill him."

"By the Cross! but you offer an enticing inducement, woman, for I have ever been sorry I

resigned from the navy, and the duty would be a pleasure to me."

"Then you accept my terms?"

"That this secret shall die with you, if I kill Hurltel of the Red Hand?"

"Yes."

"I accept, for this day have I quarreled with the Lady Grace, and if I win a name upon the seas, she may retract, for I dearly love her, woman."

"As much as one of your nature can love what is pure and lovely, boy; but you have promised?"

"Yes."

"And you vow it?"

"Yes."

"By the Cross?"

"Yes."

"By the grave! and by perdition! by high Heaven, and thy hope hereafter, you vow to do this I ask of you?"

"I do!"

"Then farewell, my Lord Gerald of Castle Cor, and a pleasant ride home to you."

"When shall I start?"

"At once."

"I will go to-night; adieu, Sathaness, until we meet again."

"Adieu, my noble Lord Gerald, and luck attend thee, that disgrace may not follow."

He made no reply, but leaping into his saddle dashed away at full speed on his return to the house, which, in spite of his desire to disbelieve what Zebel the Witch had told him, he could not but feel he had no right to.

Arriving at the castle he sought the earl, received a letter to King William,* and ere sun-

*Time of story laid about 1690, and running into the 18th century, when William Third was king.—THE AUTHOR.

set was going in haste to the nearest seaport to catch a vessel which was to sail that night for London, for the young man was more than anxious, on his own account, to hunt down and kill Hurltel of the Red Hand, as he felt assured that the famous buccaneer was indeed the former master of Castle Crag, and in the event of the Earl of Belmont's death, did he know the secret of the exchange of the dead and living infants, could lay just claim to the title and estates of his brother; but Hurltel dead, the Witch should follow, then the old nurse, ay, and last the earl himself, for fear he might repent, or go mad, and make the baleful secret known.

Then, and then only, would the devilish plotter against human life feel secure, and to accomplish this end, and yet win Lady Grace of Greyhurst by fair or foul means, Gerald, supposed Lord of Castle Cor, made to himself another vow.

CHAPTER XVII.

KENTON CAVANAUGH UNEARTHES A MYSTERY.

It was with an aching heart, that Kenton Cavanaugh turned away from Castle Cor, where he had had such a brief dream of happiness, and yet, a happiness mingled with deep grief, for he dearly loved his old father, and mourned deeply his sad and untimely end.

But there, suddenly before his astonished eyes, and years before he had dreamed of such a thing coming to pass, he had seen himself an honored guest of the Earl of Belmont, and an officer of the Royal Navy, while praises for his courage were heard upon every side.

And yet, in the midst of his success, he had met with insult from the brother of the woman he now madly loved.

Proud, sensitive and just toward himself, he could not remain under the same roof with Lord Gerald, and consequently he dashed the cup of bliss from his lips, hardly tasted, and turned away to feast on gall and wormwood.

Descending the path to the beach, he walked swiftly along toward his old home, determined to seek comfort in the memories of the past, that the ashes of his childhood's cabin would recall.

Standing in the shadow of a tree, whose branches had been scorched by the flames, he pondered over the past, and said, sadly:

"Ah, my poor dead father, what a joyous visit would it have been to me, had you lived to greet me, and say that you were proud of your boy; but you rest in your grave now, and I remain to one day avenge you, for well I know who it was that murdered you, ay, and you were murdered for me; they sought me, not you, and the bloodhounds were set on by Lord Manly of Meredith Castle.

"A bright record indeed for a young noble to begin life," he added, bitterly, and, after a pause, continued:

"Alas! am I wretched indeed, for insult has driven me from her presence, but I will yet make men, high and low, feel that I am not a dog to be spit upon, if I have not noble blood in my veins."

For a long time he hung around the old familiar spot, and at last, as a sudden idea swept over him he stepped forward, seized a rusty boat-hook, and commenced scraping away the

It was an easy task, for the old cabin had not

been massive in its structure, and he soon had a clear place, just where the hearth had been.

Familiar with the old hearthstone, before which he had so often sat on winter nights, listening to the teachings of old Dermot within, and the howling winds and roaring surf without, he soon raised a heavy slab, which displayed a square hole beneath.

And in that sepulcher was the gold saved up by the old fisherman from the sales of fish and game.

It was all there, untouched, and unsought for, proving more conclusively that robbery had not been the cause of the attack on the cot, for who had believed that there was gold to be found in an humble fisherman's cabin?

And there was more than the gold, for a small, iron-bound box, skillfully inlaid with ivory, was there, and taking it out and placing the money in his belt, Kenton Cavanaugh walked away to the shelter of the trees and sat down to examine the contents of the little box.

Several times had the youth seen his father open it by a concealed spring, and had him tell him that there was a secret held in there that one day he should know.

His memory did not fail him about the spring, and the lid of the box flew open, revealing the contents. A pair of iron manacles, filed apart, told a tale of misery and imprisonment, escape, and perhaps death; then came a dagger, blood-stained to the hilt, and this also told a story, and was linked in the mind of Kenton Cavanaugh with the iron manacles.

A necklace of pearls, a roll of what appeared to be fine linen, but which unrolled displayed a suit of baby clothing, a bundle of papers, and a crucifix of solid gold, comprised the contents of the box.

Upon these did Kenton Cavanaugh gaze with strange curiosity, and one by one he raised them.

Taking up the manacles first, he read on a bit of paper attached to them:

"Filed off at midnight December 25th, 1675."

These were laid back in the box, and the dagger was closely examined, and it, too, had a piece of paper attached, and on it, in the same hand as the writing on the manacles, was written:

"The dagger that gave me freedom, after ten long years in a dungeon. December 25th, 1675—one quarter of an hour after midnight."

The crucifix was next examined, and again a scrap of paper told its story:

"My companion on the gallows, December 1st, 1665. My companion in prison for ten years."

Around the roll of linen was a silk scarf, and upon this was pinned, with skill and neatness:

"An escaped prisoner, seeking safety in flight, one night on the Irish coast, ran his boat into a small cove, near a grand old castle, and sought repose."

"Awakened suddenly by a sound near by, he discovered that a storm had swept over sea and land, and that a large vessel was within a short distance of him."

"Glancing from his hiding place, he saw strange scenes, and at last heard cries of anguish and of anger, heard running feet, a shot, a death-cry, and down through the air came a dark object, falling into the water within ten feet of where lay his boat."

"The dark object sunk from sight, but a white object remained on the water, and the fugitive drew it toward him, and found it to be a little infant."

That the pearl necklace went with the baby-clothes Kenton did not doubt, and placing them together, he took up the package of papers.

First there was a Proclamation to Irish Patriots, to rise and cast off the yoke upon them; this was signed by "Kenton, the Irish Insurgent."

"Ha! my own name; there is some deep, strange mystery lying back of all this," said the youth, excitedly.

Another paper was a reward for the capture of the "Irish Insurgent Chief, Kenton," and offering the sum of five thousand pounds for him, "dead or alive."

Across this was written in the same hand as that upon the scraps of paper:

"Betrayed and sold by my dearest friend."

A death-warrant, condemning Kenton, the Irish Insurgent Chief, to die on the gallows came next, and upon this was written:

"Sentence commuted on the gallows to life imprisonment; not through mercy, but that I might live and suffer."

Another, and the last, read as follows:

"In this quiet nook by the sea, I have found a refuge, far from the strife of my fellow-men."

"Failing in freeing my people from the shackles they wear, betrayed and sold by my friends, condemned to die, then to live and suffer, and yet, by my own good right hand, freeing myself from a living death, here in this retreat let me find rest until the grave shall close over me, and my ashes mingle with the dust out of which I was created."

There was no signature, and yet Kenton Cavanaugh knew who had penned those lines, and he murmured, sadly:

"My father, then, was that famous Irish In-

surgent Chief, of whose strange history I have so often read! A nobleman, pitying the miseries of the people, he sought to break off their shackles, and those he would have aided betrayed him.

"Now I can understand much that was a mystery in my father's life; and I do come of noble blood—the noblest in all Ireland was Kenton Tudor's race; and I come well by my haughty pride, which is so condemned in a peasant; but was Lord Kenton Tudor, the Irish Insurgent, my father?"

"Ah! there is the mystery, and one I must solve, for the contents of this box put wild thoughts in my brain."

"See! the sun is sinking behind the horizon, and I must not forget my promise to Zebel the Witch, for I will meet her, come what may."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE LIGHTNING'S STROKE.

HARDLY had the sun sunk behind the distant hills, when there rolled up above the horizon a mass of black clouds, that plainly betokened a storm.

But, unheeding the threatening elements Kenton Cavanaugh went to the beach, and shoved his little skiff into the sea, the same in which a little over two weeks before he had sailed out to the cruiser in.

It had been undisturbed by any one, doubtless from a superstitious dread of going near the scene of murder by night, and a fear to be seen from Castle Cor by day, rather than from strict honesty: the sail was furled around the mast, as Dermot had left it, the oars lay on the seats, and the tiller lay by them, and it was but the work of a couple of minutes to ship the latter, step the mast, and unfold the lateen canvas to the breeze.

A gentle wind was blowing, and before it the skiff went smoothly along, rounded the headland on which stood Castle Cor, Kenton mechanically steering on his way, for he was glancing up at the massive rock structure, as one by one the lamps were lighted and streamed out over the dark waters.

Before him, still tinged with the rosy hue of departing day, was the further shore of the bay, with Castle Death rising grim and solitary above the forest back-ground, for no lights were then in the crumbling windows to beckon him on, or to welcome him after he landed.

Behind him loomed up the inky storm-clouds, growing blacker as they rolled heavenward, and casting an inky pall upon the sea.

Leaving Castle Cor astern, he headed for the cave beneath the shelter of Castle Death, and as he sped along the sky grew darker, and it seemed, when he looked ahead, that he was sailing into a very abyss of night, so black was shore and castle.

But suddenly a vivid glare broke out of the storm-clouds, lighting up momentarily the entire bay, curving shores, and castles, and blinding the young sailor with its brilliancy: and then, a second after, came a crash of Heaven's artillery, that shook the very waters, and sounded as though the armies of Heaven and Hell had met in battle.

But the firm hand on the tiller never wavered, the bows of the skiff never swerved, for the intrepid heart of Kenton Cavanaugh knew no fear, held no dread of danger on sea or land.

Again came a vivid flash, and there, on the sea tower of Castle Death appeared a strange form.

The quick eye of the sailor caught sight of a strange being, standing fearlessly upon the turrets, with arms outstretched toward the storm, as if wooing its chilling embrace, and with her long white hair streaming on the wind behind her, and the scarlet cloak floating around her shoulders like a mantle of flame.

A weird, strange creature she was, defying death, as it were, standing fearlessly upon a stone that might crumble away beneath her feet and hurl her two hundred feet below; gazing with joy upon the rising storm, and glorying in the vivid lightning, fearful thunder and the howling winds.

"Ha! ha! ha! he comes! he comes!" she shrieked forth, as the flash of lightning showed her the little skiff heading for the castle steps.

"Ha! ha! ha! he fears not darkness, danger or death," again she cried, and, in spite of his wonderful nerve Kenton Cavanaugh felt a shiver run through his heart; but the idea of turning back never entered his thoughts, though now he felt assured that he had to deal with a madwoman, and one whom the peasant and the noble, too, for in those early days superstition held full sway, believed to be a witch, possessing weird influence over men and women, knowledge of the past and future, and holding her power from Satan himself.

A few moments more and he would reach the castle steps; but again came a vivid glare, and the heavens seemed rended with fiery arrows, that descended upon the lofty sea tower of Castle Death, shivering its rocks to atoms, and sending them flying over the waters, while the huge structure seemed to sway under the shock, as though the massive foundation would sink into the sea.

Momentarily blinded and stunned by the

lightning's stroke and crash of thunder, even Kenton Cavanaugh's firm hand slipped from the tiller, and the skiff rocked violently from the concussion of the waves; but quickly recovering himself he held his boat on its course once more, and then looked upward.

The sea tower had been riven of its turrets, but yet it stood firm, ready to face a century of storms to come.

And the Witch?

She had gone, for the rock upon which her feet had rested, lay at the bottom of the bay.

"If I find not her mangled body in yonder tower, then indeed is she a witch," and Kenton Cavanaugh, sprung out upon the moss-grown water stairs, lowered his sail, and darted into the arched entrance of the sea tower, just as the storm swept with fury over the bay, and struck Castle Death with a shock that caused it to tremble to its very foundation.

CHAPTER XIX.

A PAGE FROM THE PAST.

ONCE under the shelter of the Castle, and Kenton Cavanaugh was protected from the storm, that broke with such savageness as he dashed into it, but such a protection, with the old stone pile quivering to its base, a moment before struck by the lightning's stroke, with the dead Cormac and Elpsey in the court-yard, and how many other graves in the ruin, who could tell; with the wind howling through the arched windows and long corridors, and perhaps the bleeding form of the Witch mangled among the rocks, forever deaf to the mad tempest without.

Acquainted with the inner geography of the castle, the young man wended his way through the darkness, ever and anon discovering that he was not going wrong, by the livid streams of lightning that passed into the ruin lighting up every crack and cranny as though under the glare of sunlight.

Up the stone stairway, which was descended by Sir Hurtel, his mysterious female companion, old Cormac, and Elpsey bearing an infant, twenty years before, Kenton Cavanaugh went, reaching the grand corridor and hallway, into which the chambers opened; here he paused, as the old castle again rocked under the crash of thunder that seemed rolling under its very foundations.

"Kenton Cavanaugh, you are the bravest of the brave."

The voice startled the young man, for it seemed to come from a sepulcher; but yet he recognized the tones of Zebel, the Witch, and answered quickly:

"I was seeking you, and believed that I would find only your mangled remains, Zebel, for I did not see you leave the tower before the lightning struck."

"Bah! what care I for lightning and thunder? Am I not protected by the Evil One, and has he not put his hellish blessing upon my wand, as the priest blesses the rosary or crucifix?"

In spite of himself he shuddered, for there was no one within twenty leagues of Castle Death but what believed that Zebel, the Witch, held her powers from Satan.

"You are in a defiant mood to-night, Zebel, to dare the Almighty; but I came not to quarrel, or to lecture you, but at your request for you have said you could tell me of the past and the future; but I would much rather rebuild my old cot for you, that you might live in comfort the remainder of your days, than see you roaming night and day among these old rocks."

She made no reply, but by the now incessant lightning he saw that her head was drooping, and her bosom heaving violently, and he knew that she was deeply moved, and continued:

"Come, Zebel, cast off this dire curse that seems upon you, and live like a Christian woman; I have gold, which my poor father was not robbed of, and by which we came honestly; take it, Zebel, and it will make you comfortable, for you are no longer young."

"Boy, you talk wildly; no longer young? Why I am not double your age, although my hair is like snow; grief, sufferings, made that hair white, not age; but we must not speak of myself, but of you, for I am comfortable as I am, and the only joy I will ever have in life is living as I do, causing cowardly peasants to fly from my path, and nobles to tremble at sight of me."

"You are not terrible to me, Zebel," he assured kindly.

"Oh God! do you mean that, boy? do you swear that Zebel the Witch of Castle Death, has no terror for you?" and she grasped his arm excitedly.

"Indeed you have not; I pity you, and I would see you change this life, which is akin to that of a wild beast."

"I know it, but Fate made me what I am, and my destiny I must follow to the end; so be it, I am content, for this life, akin to the wild beast, as you say, is preferable to what has been; but come, you would hear what I can tell you of thy destiny; first, to prove my truth, and that I can read signs in the heavens, even

when they are torn with storm-clouds, rent with lightning, and trembling with thunder, my sight can pierce the blackness, and, undazzled by their light, find there all you would know; come, this is the room in which my sweet story should be told; come, in here, Kenton Cavanaugh, and drink to the dregs the bitter cup I hold to your lips."

She led the way into the large room, once the favorite chamber of Hurtel of the Red Hand, when a self-exile and lonely dweller in what was then known as Castle Crag.

CHAPTER XX.

THE FIRST DRAUGHT FROM THE BITTER CUP.

UPON entering the large chamber, through which the wind swept with rude gusts, the Witch led the young man to the window, overlooking the bay, and Castle Cor beyond.

"There, now between the lightnings' flashes do you see lights in yonder castle?" she asked.

"Yes."

"That is Castle Cor, the home of the Earl of Belmont."

"Woman, I know that well."

"In that castle dwells the proud earl and his family—see! how distinctly the grand old pile was visible then, when the lightning shot down behind it; it revealed to me, that which you did not see."

"And what was that, Zebel?"

"The sweet Lady Kate seated in her window, straining her eyes upon this ruin, for she knows that you are here, that I, the Witch, am here, and that a fiery bolt descended upon the sea tower, and her heart is alarmed for your safety."

"Why should she, a proud lady, feel anxiety for me, a low-born peasant?" he asked in a bitter tone.

"Because she loves you, boy, and woman's love is a religion without a God."

"Ah! Zebel, you may read signs, but you cannot read a woman's heart."

"I am a woman, and I have a heart; even though it be of iron, with the anguish it has known; then why should I not read the heart of a woman?"

"I tell you, boy, that Kate of Cor loves you, and with the same idolatrous worship that the Mexican Priestesses love their God, the Sun."

"And she is noble, and I am low-born."

"Ha! ha! ha! why, boy, you know not what you are; it is that which I would make known to you."

"Woman, what mean you? Am I other than I seem? the son of the old fisherman, Dermot Cavanaugh?" he eagerly asked.

"I say, yes; and I say you are not the son of Dermot Cavanaugh."

"By Heaven! I half suspected it, though none could be to me more of a father than he has been."

"Then you believe me?"

"A strange suspicion I have had compels me to, though how can you know that of which I am ignorant?"

"You forget, boy, that I read the Heavens as though they were an open book, and I know, what other mortals do not."

"Then prove thy powers, by telling me who I am."

"Didst ever hear thy supposed father speak of thy mother, boy?"

"He has told me, when I asked him, that she died when I was a mere infant."

"He knew not what to tell thee, for he never knew thy mother; did he ever tell thee, boy, who thy father was?"

"I never doubted, until the day that has passed, that he was not my father."

The woman remained silent for a moment, and gradually the storm became less violent, the thunder rolled far away, and the vividness of the lightning had gone.

"Kenton Cavanaugh, as men know thee, I will say that Dermot Cavanaugh was a good man at heart, for he was a nobleman by birth and in deed; but, alas! he was the cause of untold misery for the people, as, pitying the slavery of the peasants, he sought to instill in their minds a desire for freedom, which they had not the brain to understand, and—he failed."

"Yes, failed; but not until hundreds fell before the king's troops, shot down as insurgents, and thousands went into a slavery more galling than that which they had known."

"But their leader escaped, and fled to the Colonies, where he remained for years, hatching out another rising of the people of his native land; and again he returned to Ireland, landing on the coast with a brave crew, and raised the standard of freedom once more; but, those in whom he had trusted betrayed him, and he was taken prisoner, sentenced to die on the gallows, and only escaped with his life, as the king believed his death would cause greater trouble; but he was sent for life to prison, and served ten years, when he boldly made his escape, and, as an old fisherman, found a home on this coast; now do you know who Dermot Cavanaugh really was?"

"Yes: Kenton Tudor, the Irish Insurgent chief."

"Ha! I thought thou didst not know, boy."

"Only this afternoon did I discover it, from papers found amid the ashes of our cabin."

"Tis well; but Kenton Tudor was not thy father, I say."

"Then who was, I ask, woman?"

"Hast thou nerve to drink a cup of sorrow, boy?"

"Ay, to the dregs, if it concerns me, Zebel," he answered firmly.

"Then thou shalt have it in all its bitterness; thou dost stand now in the very room in which thou wert born."

"Good God! witch! woman! whatever thou art, do you mean what you say?" he cried excitedly.

She laughed wildly for an instant, and resumed:

"Yes, and thou hast just taken the first sip from the cup of thy doom."

"And in this room, the home of Sir Hurtel, I was born?"

"True as Holy Writ; here thou wert born, and in this castle didst thou pass the first months of thy baby life."

"Woman, play not with my feelings, but tell me who were my parents, for thy words tally strangely with what I found with Dermot Cavanaugh's papers."

"I tell thee first, so thou mayest see that I do not deceive you in my powers of reading the human heart; I say that here wert thou born, and thou art the son of— No, not yet will I tell thee whom; but thy father and thy mother sailed from this castle one night of storm, strangely such a one as this is."

"Thank God! then they were guests of this castle, and not otherwise, as a horrible suspicion floated through my mind and caused me to believe, to dread, for an instant!" and the hand he laid upon her arm trembled violently.

"Yes, they sailed away from this castle, and you, a mere baby, were taken down to the base of the sea tower, to receive from them their last farewell, for you were to remain in the care of a nurse."

"But one whom thy father had angered, a Gipsy, one of a tribe encamped near—you know the spot well—was on that vessel, as one of its crew, and, then and there he struck what he believed to be a death-blow; aye, struck your father in the back with a long blade that went deep into his body."

"Believing he had killed him he sprung from the vessel's stern to the shore, and, as the hue and cry was raised after him, he seized you from the arms of the woman who held you, and bounded up the path that borders the precipice; but though men dare not fire upon him, for fear of injuring you, your mother did, and her aim was deadly, for Santos the Gipsy, sprung from the dizzy height, clutching you still in his arms, and down, down into the dark, raging waters below he plunged, and—"

"By Heaven, woman, witch, or whatever thou art, now do I know that thou art more than mortal, for Dermot Cavanaugh tells the story, by what he has written on a silk sash, of a child and a man coming over the precipice the night of the storm, within a ship's lengths of Death Castle, and that he drew the infant from the water; more he does not say, but the clothing, and a pearl necklace in his possession I know now proves that he took, and cared for that baby through life."

"And that child was you."

"In faith, I cannot doubt it; but to your story—why left my parents, as you say they were, their child to drown?"

"Did I not say to thee that thy father sunk down sorely wounded, and, as all believed, dead; and, when thy mother saw that she had avenged his death, she too swooned away, for there was no hope of rescue for the baby, yourself, boy, as Santos, the Gipsy, fell from yonder precipice, two hundred feet, bearing you in his arms, and the sea was running high, the sweeps had carried the vessel's head around until the rough winds seized the sails, and away she darted out of the bay, and lucky, too, for she carried her commission in her captain's sword."

"Woman, for the love of Heaven! tell me what dark deeds you hint at now?"

"First let me tell you that you were that baby, and Dermot Cavanaugh saved your life and raised you as his own child."

"That I know. Now tell me of my parents."

"Thy father did not die; ay, he came no nearer death with his fearful wound than did thy mother with her broken heart at the loss of her babe."

"But whither sailed they?"

"Over the deep seas, wherever the wind listeth to waft their vessel, and where gold-freighted ships sailed thickest."

"Fiend! do you dare hint that those whom I now believe to be my parents were free rovers? Do you dare hint that my father would drag my mother into deeds of outlawry and crime?"

"Ha! ha! ha! honorable indignation from such as thou! ha! ha! ha!" and the woman laughed maliciously until the young man seized her with a grasp of iron, and, fearfully excited, bitted forth:

"If thou dost not tell me why you laugh mockingly in speaking of my parents, I will hurl thee into the sea!"

"Hurl thee into the sea! his father's very words; ay, and, like that father, he will do as he threatens."

The woman seemed to momentarily forget the existence of the youth, as some bygone memory swept over her; but he recalled her quickly to the present by saying, in deep tones:

"Yes, cast one blot upon the fair name of those to whom I owe my very being, and, were thou even not a witch, I would hurl thee to thy death, into the dark waters below."

She glanced into his face, dimly visible, and saw that he would keep his word, while the clutch upon her arm told her that he was not Lord Gerald, of Castle Cor, that she could handle as she could a child, and then, for the first time in her life, Zebel, the Witch, trembled with fear.

CHAPTER XXI.

QUAFFING ANOTHER DRAUGHT FROM THE BITTER CUP.

"Boy, I came here to tell you the truth of the past, not to be threatened, because that which I would say rings not pleasantly in your ears," and the same defiant manner came back to the woman.

"Then cease thy mocking laughter, when you speak of those whose names I look upon as sacred."

"Must I lie? hold them up before thy gaze as saints, when I know them to be—"

"What?"

"Devils."

In an instant his hands were upon her, with a force she had no power to resist, and raising her in his arms he was about to hurl her into the depths below, when her loud, piercing shriek recalled him to himself, and he placed her on her feet once more, saying humbly:

"Woman, I would ask your pardon; I was not myself, for things have gone wrong with me of late, and more, it is hard to hear one's parents spoken of as though they were the basest of the base."

"Boy, thou hast an iron grip; the same that thy father had, for he too was a marvel of strength; but lay not thy hands on me again, for I like not their touch, and, as thou dost not care to hear what I would tell thee, go!"

For a moment he seemed half inclined to obey her; but then he said: "This is cowardice in me, to dread hearing the truth; speak! I will listen to all thou hast to say."

"And keep thy lion paws off me, if I speak that which does not chime in with thy desires?"

"Yes, I'll not touch thee again, for already am I ashamed that I should have intended harm to a woman."

"Now, thou dost reason as I would have thee; well, I said that thy parents were devils."

She paused, but though he started at the word, he remained silent, and she continued:

"That they loved thee there is no doubt, and that they mourned thy supposed death is true; for, hadst thou been with them, their love, if not their lives might have been different."

"And who were they?"

"Devils, I say," she answered, seemingly with malicious joy at torturing him; but he said calmly:

"So thou has told me thrice: now give me their names and rank."

"I will, though with the first sip of the cup, you will find it gall; thy mother was a Gipsy."

"A Gipsy? Why I'd rather she were a peasant even," and he assumed a manner as though to meet her assertions with cool indifference.

"Yes, she was a Gipsy; one of the tribe of Benedictine, and from Old Spain; but differing from the usual forest children, they roamed by sea, and encamped on land, always near the sea, for they owned a fleet of swift craft, a score or more in number, and spread their sails for any part of the world; now landing in the Colonies, then in Italy; again on the coast of the Mediterranean, and again in France, until at last their roving nature brought them to these shores, and not half a league from here."

"So balmy was the air, so fertile the soil, so contented were they in Ireland, that for a long time their vessels remained idle, anchored in what is now called Gipsy Cove; and there it was that the maiden, who won your father's heart, dwelt with her people."

"Once he saved her from abuse by some angry peasants, and from that day her heart went forth to him, though she was destined by the laws of her tribe to marry one of her own race, a young man who was yet to wear the title of king of her people."

"He loved her, and she was content until the day when your father crossed her path."

"And who was my father, woman?"

"Don't be too anxious to know, for, the word of Zebel the Witch for it, you will not be proud of him."

The youth shuddered at her ominous reply, but remained silent, and she continued:

"Your father was as fearless as I am, and one night, just such an one as this has been, he attempted to ride along the bay here now, although the sea was breaking wildly over it, and he was swept out by the waves, his horse was owned beneath him, and he would have died

in the wild waves, for he was being driven out to sea, when John, the Gipsy, returning to her camp in her little life skiff ran upon him, and—saved him."

"It would have been better for both, according to you, woman, if she had left him to die."

"Yes, far better; but she took him to her camp, and his arm being broken, and his head cut by the keel of her boat, she nursed him back to life."

"But Santos the Gipsy became jealous, swore revenge, and, that night on the vessel, as I have said, he drove a knife into your father's back."

"He married the Gipsy girl then?"

"Ha! ha! ha! married her, did you say?"

"Yes, won by her devotion to him and wishing to repay her for all she had done—"

"Ha! ha! ha! no, boy, he did not marry her, ah no! but he took her from her people, and—"

He again stepped toward her, but checking himself, said, in hoarse tones:

"Witch of Hell! I will listen to all thou hast to say, blacken my name as thou mayst; but, if thy words are false, then I swear to thee, I will urge the peasantry to burn thee at the stake, and well thou knowest how willing they are to kindle the fire around thee."

"If I speak false, then carry thy oath into execution; but mark ye, I'll have my revenge for that threat, boy, in seeing thee writhe under my words."

"I say that thy father did not make thy mother his wife, and more, thou art his son, and the son of Jule the Gipsy."

"Oh, God! this is terrible!" and he groaned in agony of spirit.

"Aha! the iron enters thy heart now, but be brave, for I am not done yet, the cup is not more than half quaffed, and the dregs, you know, settle in the bottom."

He paced to and fro, and the clouds having drifted away the starlight shone resplendent, and showed that his face was deadly pale, as he turned it to the arched window, for the winds to cool his burning brow.

"Hast collected thy nerve to hear more?" asked Zebel the Witch in a malicious tone.

"Yes, what more can I hear?"

"That you shall know anon," and she drew nearer to him, laying her hand upon his arm, and turning her burning black eyes full upon his own.

CHAPTER XXII.

DRAINING TO THE DREGS THE CUP OF WOE.

"YES," continued the Witch in a low, but painfully distinct tone, "thou art basely born."

He shrunk from her, as though a serpent had stung him, and yet he remained silent, though his lips moved.

Apparently she enjoyed the pain she gave, for upon her face rested a devilish smile, such an one as Satan might wear, when welcoming a lost soul into his Inferno.

"But thou art not responsible for the sins of thy parents, for Gipsy Jule loved your father, and believed that he loved her; she was ambitious, aimed high in life and fell lower than the lowest, yet she clung to the man for whom she had sacrificed honor, and her people, clung to him through all."

"But at length, urged to it by the discarded Gipsy lover, Santos, her tribe determined that Jule must give up her lover, or that he must become one of her people."

"It was talked over at the Death Council that condemns an unworthy Gipsy to death, and all decided that if she did not obey, and leave the man she had forsaken them for, that she must die, and this they told her."

"But he would not give her up, and asked if there was no way to save her?"

"Yes, her life could be saved by his casting away from him his creed, his kindred, his countrymen, and his native land, in fact by becoming, like Jule, one of a roving race."

"He was given one month to decide, and he decided as Gipsy Jule urged: he became one of the tribe of Sea Wanderers."

"And more: recognizing his greatness, and appreciating his courage, at the death of the old king, the lineal Benedictine, they made your father their royal ruler."

"It is a relief to know that he did not desert the maiden he had dishonored, be she Gipsy or peasant," said the young man coldly.

"Build up no hopes in your heart that your father had honor, for he had not."

"I say he was chosen Gipsy king, and then a council was held, for the people along the Irish coast were imbittered against the wandering tribe, the treasure-box of the tribe was running low, and it was decided that they must spread their white sails and fly to other lands, while the royal craft, as fleet as the wind, armed and manned, must cruise awhile for riches."

"Of that royal craft your father was made captain, by right of his being king, and thus it was that he became a pirate."

Again the blow struck hard, and the man reeled, as though about to fall, but recovering himself, he said hoarsely, "Go on! why do you pause?"

"To give you time to rally, for, strong as you are, I make you feel."

"Yes, your father became a pirate, for, while

his people, for he was a Gipsy, you know, boy, sought another haven in a foreign land, he, wedded to the sea, and the wild life he led, hoisted the banner of the buccancer, and swept from sea to sea, spreading terror along every coast, and winning a name that sent a shudder to the bravest heart."

"And what was that name, woman?"

"Have ever heard that the Earl of Belmont had a brother?"

"Yes, but for the love of God! speak!"

"A brother," coolly continued the woman, "whom he cheated of his bride, and sent to lonely exile in this castle?"

"Yes, yes, I say."

"Well, that brother was it, that dishonored Gipsy Jule."

"What! Hurltel of the Red Hand?"

"Ay, your father: Hurltel of the Red Hand!"

A cry broke from the pallid lips of the wretched man, and he fell his full length upon the stone floor, and, as though death had placed his icy touch upon his pulse, lay motionless as the rock upon which the castle stood.

CHAPTER XXIII.

HOPE'S FAREWELL.

"HOLY HEAVEN! I have killed him; his heart was too tender to stand the rude thrusts; no, no, no, he is not dead! he will not die! he shall not die!"

"Yes, I, Zebel the Witch, will it; he shall not die!"

She quickly fled from the room, and returning, in a moment or two, ignited a taper and held the flame near his face, shading it with her hand, that the wind might not blow it out.

"He looks as though he were dead; but he is not," and she felt his pulse, and with a scared look dropped his hand and pressed her ear against his heart.

"Ha! ha! ha! the temple of clay is yet tenanted with life! ha! ha! ha! now to fetch him back from this death-like swoon."

She chafed his hands, bathed his face with water from a flask, which hung to her belt, and then dropped a liquid from a tiny bottle on his lips.

The effect was wonderful, for back once more came swinging the pendulum of life; the eyes opened, the red blood rushed into the face, a shudder shook his frame, and, with a sudden bound the man was on his feet once more.

Yet his eyes wandered wildly about, and for an instant, as she gazed upon him, he feared that he had gone mad; that grief had turned his brain.

"Ha! now I remember all, thou hag of Satan; thou didst say that I was the son of an unwedded woman; of Gipsy Jule of the Wandering Race?"

"Yes, so said I."

"And more; thou didst say that I was the son of Sir Hurltel of Castle Crag?" and, as he asked the question, leaning against the stone window, he was strangely calm.

"Yes, so said I," answered Zebel the Witch in equally as calm tones.

"And more! thou didst say that Sir Hurltel, once the master of Castle Crag, now known as Castle Death, was Hurltel of the Red Hand."

"Yes, the pirate whose bloody deeds upon the sea gained for him that name; yes, he was thy father."

"Dost know where he is now?"

"He is upon the sea, flying his pirate banner, and leaving behind him a red wake, and the wails of women and children, the cries of dying men, to follow him upon every wind that wafts him along."

"Ha! ha! ha! you are a false witch, if thou sayest that Hurltel of the Red Hand lives."

With a spring like a tiger at its prey, the woman was upon him, her hands upon either shoulder, while she hissed forth:

"Thou liest! Hurltel of the Red Hand is not dead."

"And I echo back the lie, for I say that he is, and that thou art a false witch."

She saw that he spoke as one who meant all that he said, and she asked in a low tone:

"How know you this?"

"How know I that Hurltel of the Red Hand is dead? Why, because I saw him die."

"When?"

"Two weeks ago."

"Where?"

"At sea, on his own deck."

"Ha! you sailed from here in a king's cruiser?"

"Aha! it is your turn to question now, and you look as if my words were not music to your ears, woman."

"If you speak the truth, then are thy words dulcet tones in my ears, ay, and honeyed drops into my heart."

"I speak the truth, for I saw him die."

"Your cruiser engaged him then?"

"Yes, we had first a storm, if you remember it, then we met a frigate, which proved to be the *Wanderer*, the vessel of Hurltel of the Red Hand."

"And you captured her?"

"No; her crew boarded us, and we drove them back to their decks, and cutting loose they sailed away, leaving us crippled; but, woman, the pirates took not with them their chief."

"Ha! ha! ha! and you strung him up to the yard-arm?"

"No, he fell fighting bravely: *fell by my hand.*"

"No, no, no! *by thy hand?*"

"Yes."

"But he was a splendid swordsman, and none dared cross blades with him."

"I dared, and I ran him through the heart; but he died hard, as a father should, *at the hand of a beloved son.*"

The intense bitterness of tone cannot be described in which the youth spoke, and yet youth no longer, for in one hour he had become as a man of double his years, so deeply into his tone had the iron of anguish entered.

And then, through the old ruin rung the woman's mocking laughter, while she danced in very glee at some inborn thought of misery to others; and silently he looked upon her, until at last he said:

"Agony to others, is joy to you, woman."

"Boy, you have—"

"Call me not *Boy*; no longer am I young, for the weight of ages of wretchedness are upon me," he said sternly.

"I will not contradict you; one who dare not claim his own mother, and sent his father's soul shrieking to perdition, must needs not feel like a child; but do you tell me the truth? Is Hurltel of the Red Hand dead?"

"I have said it, Witch of Hell."

"And died he by your hand?"

"He did."

"Then there is some joy in life after all for Zebel the Witch; ah! now I see why thou wear'st the garb of thy king, with an officer's rank on thy shoulders: thou didst get reward for killing thy own father; ha! ha! ha! it is well that King Billy knew not from whose loins thou didst come, or he'd not commissioned in his royal navy the dishonored brat of a pirate and a Gipsy."

"Woman, thy insults touch me not, for whatever thou might say would not be more than the reality of knowing who and what I am; for I do not doubt but you have told the truth."

"Oh! I read the truth only to thee; dost doubt it, hast thou ever seen the portrait of Hurltel in Castle Cor?"

"Yes; but I have also seen Hurltel himself."

"Then hast thou seen thyself: the same dark face, sad eyes and stern mouth; the same tall form, slender waist and broad shoulders, in which lay a giant's strength: dost see thy own resemblance, man, to the *devil, thy father?*"

"I do: the peasant boys have often, when I was a little fellow, called me Sir Hurltel, and only last night did the Earl of Belmont tell me I was strangely like his brother in appearance," was the cool reply.

"Well, why dost thou not spring from that window in despair?"

"Why should I?"

"Because of thy dishonored birth, and of thy father's name."

"No, I will face it."

"And will you win more honor on King Billy's ship, when thou knowest that—"

"No, no! oh God! no!"

"Ha! ha! you can yet feel, thou man of iron nerve; but tell me, would you not know of thy mother?"

"Ay, poor woman, I pity, not condemn her; tell me of my mother, if thou knowest aught regarding her fate."

"*She is dead.*"

"Dead! then is she at rest in the grave?"

"But she lies not in a grave."

"Dead, and yet not in a grave?" he asked in an absent-minded way.

"Yes, she was hurled into the sea, and *by your father!*"

"Ha! did he this crime too? But then he was worthy of it, being who he was."

"You seem not proud of thy father."

"Oh yes; no man ever won the name he did, so why not have pride in his name?"

"True, and no man will ever again be the cruel being he was," she said impressively.

"Why?"

"Because monsters in human form, such as he was, are not often found, and well they are not; but tell me, hast thou hopes of Kate of Castle Cor?"

The man's head drooped against the stone, and he remained silent; for over him came all that he would lose by being what he was.

"Wilt thou ask Lady Kate of Castle Cor, to wed the son of Hurltel the Red Hand?"

He turned fiercely toward her, and almost shrieked forth:

"No, a thousand times, no! from this night I bid farewell to every hope of ambition to every thought of love, and go forth—"

"Where?"

"I know not; I care not! only let me hide myself from honorable men and I will be content," he said bitterly.

"Thou canst be worthy of thy father, didst thou wish?"

"Ha! fiend! temptress! serpent! what mean you?" he cried, again seizing her with a grasp that made her scream out with pain.

"Unhand me, and I will tell you."

He released her, and she said simply:

"Follow me!"

Silently he obeyed, and she led him from the room, along the dark corridor to the sea tower.

CHAPTER XXIV.
THE STRANGE VESSEL.

UPON reaching the sea tower, the Witch and the man into whose ears she had poured such a bitter story of misery, crime and horror, found the stone stairs choked up with the *debris* of the turrets, which had been shattered by the lightning's stroke.

But, picking their way up the stairs, over the atoms of stone and dirt, they soon reached the top.

The parapet of stone was all gone upon the sea side, the flooring rent, and other marks were visible of the fearful stroke the storm-clouds had hurled upon the tower, as if in anger of the deadly and evil scenes enacted within the castle walls.

"Why have you brought me here, Zebel?"

"It was a moment before the stroke that I stood here."

"I saw you, and feared for your life."

"Oh, no, death and I are wide apart, yet; there is more devilry for my hands to do, more anguish for my tongue to give to those I hate."

"Then you hate me, Zebel?"

"Did I love thee would I tell thee what I have?"

"No; but what have I done to wrong thee, woman?"

"It matters not; at least not now; but though I hate thee, I would serve thee."

"A strange paradox; but why brought you me here?"

"To serve you, I say; to show you how you can be worthy of thy red-handed father!"

"Tell me and I'll prove me no dull pupil, Zebel, Witch," he said, bitterly.

She had already been glancing earnestly around her and upon the sea, and suddenly cried:

"Ah! 'tis there; now look where I point: what see you creeping close inshore under the shadow of Castle Cor?"

"A vessel!"

"Ay, a vessel it is; and what do you make her out?"

He gazed earnestly at the strange sail for a moment, and then said, slowly:

"If I mistake not it is the frigate of Hurltel the Red Hand."

"You have good eyes; it is his lugger; but he commands her not, eh?"

"I have told you that I killed him, woman."

"Ah! I like to hear the sweet words again."

"But what does his vessel here?"

"Where has his vessel a better right to go than to the castle of its master?"

"True; and yonder vessel is coming here?"

"She is; she was due last night; for once each six months she comes into this bay, and—"

"I am listening."

"And she generally seeks a night of storm, for there are curious eyes upon this coast, my lord."

"What comes yonder vessel here for?"

"That you will soon know; see, she is stretching across the bay, and is heading for the base of this tower."

"True."

"Well, wouldst thou know why she comes, I will tell thee that it is to hide her ill-gotten gains in the vaults of this castle; there are vast riches there now, jewels that sparkle as the eyes of the sweet lady of Castle Cor; emeralds as blue as the orbs of Lady Grace of Greyhurst Castle; gold as pure as the woman thou dost love; silver from the mines of the Ind, and all gems, gold, silver, stained with blood."

"I do not doubt it."

"The blood of men and of women, ay, and of children."

"Yes, some said that Hurltel of the Red Hand, my noble father, held no mercy."

"Nor did he."

"And in this old castle he hid his ill-gotten treasure?"

"Yes."

"And yonder vessel now comes to land more treasure?"

"Yes; or to take away what is here, divide it among the crew, and seek safety away from the seas, now that the great chief is dead."

"Would they save their necks they are wise."

"But will you allow yourself to be thus robbed?"

"What have I to do with the gold, woman?"

"You are the son of your father," she said, significantly.

"Well?"

"You inherit his crimes, why not his blood-money?"

"By Heaven! you reason well."

"I reason justly; claim your gold, ay, and—"

"And what more would you tempt me to do?"

"Yonder lugger you have seen sail?"

"Ay."

"And ride out a hurricane, which you say swept over you before she was righted?"

"Yes."

"She is stanch?"

"As a ship of the line."

"Swift?"

"Like the wind."

"Carries a good armament?"

"None better afloat of her tonnage."

"And a brave crew?"

"Very devils in action."

"Then you are a sailor?"

"I am."

"You will not return to King Billy's service?"

"Never again care I to raise my head among honorable men."

"But among those who are like yourself, dishonored?"

"They are fit companions."

"Then let them be your comrades; *yonder vessel needs a commander.*"

The intense expression she threw into what she said, made it more forcible than what she uttered, and it struck home where she meant it should, for he clapped his hands together, and cried:

"You are right, Witch of Perdition; I should follow in the career of my father; as he fell beneath my hand, I am worthy to be such as he was, as I slew the commander of yonder pirate craft, it is but just that I should get them another—and *who better than I?*"

"No one; go down to the base of this tower; there is a secret passage leads from it to a vault beneath the main castle; there it is that the blood stained treasure is hidden. You are fearless; await the coming of yonder vessel, and act as circumstances may dictate—come!"

She dragged him, rather than led him, down the *debris*-covered stairway, and reaching the base, she pointed out through the arched doorway, and said:

"There comes your vessel; upon her decks it lies with you to make yourself what and whom you please."

"I will; but tell me, woman, as you know my past so well, what name gave me my parents?"

"Thy mother named thee; she called thee by a name which, in the Gipsy tongue, signifies *base-born.*"

"And that name is—"

"K. Y. D."

"K. Y. D."

"Yes."

"So be it; the whole world shall know the name of Kyd."

There was no reply; no mocking laughter, and turning to where she had stood, he saw that she was gone.

He called to her, but no answer came.

He was alone in Castle Death, and there, within a cable's length, was the lugger of Hurltel the Red Hand, *his father*, looking like the huge white spirit of a vessel, relieved against the dark waters and darker rocks.

CHAPTER XXV.
THE DECISION.

As the vessel neared the land, it had lowered its large lugger sails, and under only a jib and trysail, or spanker, came slowly toward the rock at the base of the sea tower, and which was the landing of the castle.

Standing in the shadow of the tower, he now plainly saw that it was the lugger which, two weeks before, the cruiser had engaged, and whose chief he had killed.

"Ay, they said then I was strangely like the—the—my father, for why deny him now? Even Captain Defoe spoke of the striking resemblance," he muttered, and he watched its approach with interest, hope and despair running riot in his heart, for not himself guilty, he one moment thought why should he become so; and then, feeling how base his father had been, he felt that the stain had fallen upon him.

As the waves were still rough, the lugger wore round when near the rock, came up into the wind, and hoisting her mainsail only, lay as still as though she had come to anchor.

Upon her decks were crowds of men, and from her trim look it was evident that she had repaired the damages sustained in her fight with the king's cruiser.

A moment after a large boat was lowered, and into it crowded full a dozen men, who spoke in low tones, and appeared to be anxious not to attract attention, should any heated peasant be wandering along the bay road.

"Oh God! have I come to this? To-day life was all that hope could make it: to-night it is as gloomy as this old ruin, and my heart is as scarred by grief and shame as this pile of stone by the finger of time, and the shocks of the storms."

"And shall I link my fate with these men? descend in one night from the high pedestal of honor upon which I stood, and sink into the hell of iniquity?"

"But am I not the fit comrade of these men?"

"If they are outcasts, in God's name what am I?"

"If they are branded with outlawry, what am I?"

"If society turns her back on them, and sets the bloodhounds of justice upon their path, would it take me into its fold?"

"Am I not lower than the lowest of them, for was I not born in infamy?"

"What hope have I to win honor, when I was dishonored at my birth?"

"By the Cross! I am not even the fit comrade of pirates."

He paced to and fro for an instant; overwhelmed by his bitter thoughts, and then stopped suddenly, and exclaimed:

"Hail can I not live without this stain showing upon my brow?"

"What if I should win honor, and—no, no, no, that witch of Hades would make known the fell secret, and then down, down, down into the mire of shame and guilt would I sink," he cried in impassioned and despairing tones.

"No, like a living serpent in my heart and brain would be that secret; that vessel comes here, guided by Fate, to decide my course."

"With it I cast my destiny; yesterday a man of honor; to-day a pirate—ay, more than a pirate."

He buried his face in his hands and shook with emotion, for over him swept the remembrance of all he gave up, and floating before his eyes came the fair form of Kate of Castle Cor, waving him a last farewell, and shutting out from her eyes, as it were, with horror, the man whom she had loved, and who had fallen so low.

"Let fall!"

The low, stern order reached his ears distinctly, and then came the splash of oars in the water.

"Give way!"

The boat moved slowly toward the stone stairway of the castle, and the wretched man who watched its approach, shrunk further back into the gloom of the tower, his mind made up, come what might, he would cast his lot with the pirate crew.

CHAPTER XXVI.

AN APPARITION.

WHEN the boat touched the stone stairway three men sprang out, one of whom turned and said:

"Lay off a boat's length and be ready to come if I call, though I dread no danger, as no one is likely to be near this old castle. When I need you I will send after you."

"Ay, ay, senor," answered the boat's coxswain, and the order was obeyed, the men resting on their oars near the shore.

The one who appeared the leader, and who wore his arm in a silk scarf, as though it was wounded, then called to the two who had sprung ashore with him, and taking a ship's battle lantern from beneath his cloak held it above his head to light the way, and, with a sword in his right hand, moved through the arched entrance to the tower.

"You know the spot well, Senor Evan, I suppose?" asked one.

"Yes; I have been here half a dozen times with Captain Hurltel," was the answer.

"Well, it's a safe place to hide a treasure, as I'd be afraid of spooks and goblins here in broad daylight," said the third man.

"Is said the castle is haunted, and I do not doubt it; but the treasure here is enough to make me face the devil himself," was the remark of the leader. "And we are to have the jewels, and the crew the gold; that is the arrangement, I believe?"

"We are to help ourselves to a round fortune in jewels each, and the balance and the gold and silver will be divided on board ship; of course the crew will not know about those we have concealed about our persons."

"True, Evan, very true; we'll take what we want, and then make an equal division of what is left between all hands; but don't you think you'd have gotten the lion's share if you had not been afraid to come in here alone?"

"What have I to fear, Carl?"

"Oh, nothing; only this is a place where it is best to have company along, and a good dozen men in easy call; but what honest fellows we'll be when we divide spoils and go ashore to spend our hard earnings."

"Yes, I'll go into business, for I'm tired of throat-cutting, and besides, without the captain the tables would be turned upon us, and I fear our throats would be cut."

"You are right; I never saw such a cowardly set of men since our fight with the cruiser; but which way now, Evan, for I'm anxious to finger that treasure and get ashore somewhere as quickly as possible, though I liked the life when Captain Hurltel was alive."

"This way," come," and the leader moved on once more, for the three had stopped within the arched corridor leading under the castle to look at their arms, raise the wicks of their lanterns, and make ready for the work ahead.

That all three dreaded entering the vaults of the castle was evident, and only the desire for the vast treasure hidden there could have screwed their courage up to going, for, once the combat with the cruiser, which lost them their captain, the crew of the lugger had been terribly demoralized, and fear, not repentance, had caused them to hold a council, at which it was

determined unanimously to lead a different life; and this determination was more readily arrived at, on account of their having no confidence in their lieutenants, one of whom was the leader Evan.

Following the corridor the three men continued their way, passing beneath the stone pillars that upheld the center of the castle, and presently coming to a small chamber excavated out of the solid rock.

"Here's the spot, and a Calcutta dungeon is not blacker; now let me see; you hold my lamp, Carl," and the lieutenant placed his back against the wall and continued:

"It is ten paces straight ahead, and I reach the slab, which, when raised, reveals the vault; hold up your lanterns—there; now here goes—one! two! three! four! five—"

"Hold!"

"Holy Virgin! it's Hurltel's ghost!"

The cry broke from the man's lips in the wildest terror, and his comrades beholding a tall form in the dim distance, with arms outstretched, dropped their lanterns and cutlasses and bounded away in the wildest alarm.

And Evan too would have fled, but his knees faltered, and muttering *pater noster* he stood gazing wild-eyed at the apparition, which he was firmly convinced was the ghost of his dead captain.

"What do you here?" demanded the supposed apparition sternly, his voice sounding deep and sepulchral in the vault.

"Good captain, I came for the treasure, believing you needed it not in the other world; but senor, it was my firm intention to give half of it to the padres, to pray your soul out of purgatory."

"Liar, not a farthing would you have given for the rest of the soul of Hurltel of the Red Hand," was the stern response.

"Well, I guess there's no use lying to a ghost, captain, so I'll make a clean breast of it; except what myself, and those two cowardly knaves that fled, stowed away for ballast, we were going to divide among all of us aboard ship; but I'll not touch the treasure, Captain Hurltel, if you say you need it where you've gone."

"Fool. I am not Hurltel of the Red Hand," and he that has been known as Kenton Cavanaugh strode forward into the full glare of the lamps.

"Not Hurltel of the Red Hand! then you must be his ghost, for strangely like him you are!"

"I am not his ghost, though I made a ghost of him; 'twas I that sheathed my sword in his heart."

"Sainted Mother! then I'll soon follow Captain Hurltel; tell them not to cut me down, for I surrender," cried the man, now fully convinced that he had a ship's crew to deal with, and that they were concealed back in the shadows of the vault.

"Coward! you have but me to deal with, man to man; but I want no quarrel with you, for, on the contrary I can serve you."

"In Satan's name who are you?" asked the buccaneer.

"I am an adventurer, without name, rank, kindred or friends," was the bitter reply.

"And yet you are the man who so cleverly handled Captain Hurltel two weeks ago, for I recognize you now; and, by my faith, but you are strangely like him, messmate, though much younger."

"I was on the cruiser, and an officer; now I am nobody."

"In faith, I doubt you, and would hate to come to close quarters with you; but tell me, messmate, who are you?"

"I am the son of Hurltel of the Red Hand!"

"By St. Barnabas! but you look it; this then is your treasure, your inheritance, and dearly as I love gold, I'm not the man to contest the right of its ownership with you, for I saw you swing a cutlass the other day."

"You, and your crew are welcome to the treasure; go and bring your men here and transfer it to the boat."

"By the Rood! but you are generous, and I'll take you at your word; you are as generous as was your father, messmate: I'll return anon, and bring with me the lads, if they have not spread sail on the lugger and put to sea."

"In haste, then! return with them and the treasure is yours, for I want it not."

"I'll obey you, messmate, and with alacrity; but you'll bear me out before the crew that I bravely faced you, even though believing you old Hurltel's ghost."

"I'll bear you out that you would have fled with your men, had not your coward legs refused to support your weight; but this talk is idle, man; go for those runaways and return at once."

There was something in the manner and look of the man, he had so unexpectedly and strangely encountered, that showed he would stand no further trifling, and Evan quickly turned, took up one of the fallen lanterns, and departed, the rays of light causing his shadow on the walls to appear like a dancing giant.

"Well, you are generous, to give away your inheritance."

"Hail! it is you, is it, thou imp of perdition?"

What care I for gold, when my parents have left me such a rich inheritance of infamy?"

"Still moping, I see; never mind, redder your hands a little with blood and you'll soon get your mind at ease; one murder causes specters to be ever before you, and a dozen men's lives upon your hands, drives the phantoms away; but tell me, do you go with that vessel?"

"I do."

"As what?"

"Their chief."

"Suppose they rebel?"

"I will quell rebellion."

"You have nerve, and you will succeed."

"I intend to."

"That is right, and I expect to hear great things of *The Kyd*."

"You shall not be disappointed. I shall be king of the Black Flag."

"Hail! hail! I rejoice to hear you say so, for I love to have you commit crime; but stand here on this slab with me, for I need a little of this precious dross, and as you are so generous you will not refuse your old Zebel a few guilders."

"Take what you like," and at her direction he stepped upon the twelfth slab from the wall, and the eleventh one raised slowly up, like the lid of a chest.

Taking up one of the lanterns the Witch held it over the opening, which was about four feet deep and three feet square; a vault in which were bags of gold, boxes of jewels and jewelry, bars of silver, diamond-hilted daggers, swords gem-studded, and a crucifix of precious metal and rare workmanship.

"This is a souvenir those fellows won't need, for they served the Devil, their master," said the woman, thrusting the crucifix into her bosom.

"And this bag of gold they will not miss; what they have never had they will never lose; and now a jewel or two, and I am done, with thanks for your generosity."

She took the things named, and then the slab was lowered into its place once more, The Kyd silently aiding, yet with a look of scorn upon his face.

"Now, farewell, Sir Pirate, for we must part; but remember, we shall meet again—farewell!"

He made no reply, and she glided away in the gloom, just as the sound of footsteps warned them that Evan and his comrades were returning.

But the pirate lieutenant came upon the safe side this time, for the whole of his boat's crew were at his back.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE DIE IS CAST.

"Ah, senor, you are there: in faith, I almost expected to find you gone, for I was half believing you a ghost," said Evan, as he came forward, while his men stood back, half in gloom, and eyed the youth suspiciously, for they did not like the surroundings.

"Were I to put my grip on you once, sir, you would not doubt my being of the earth; but come, get your treasure, and let us leave this black hole, for the night is wearing on apace."

"I am willing, senor, but do you go with us, as your words hint?"

"I do."

"Well, I'll give you a berth on board the lugger, if only for the sake of your old father, while I'll not forget your generosity."

"I ask favor of no man, sir; take your treasure and come, for there are cruisers on this coast that may seek anchorage in the bay, and woe to your lugger then; lend a hand here, men, and bear this trash to your boat."

He sprang upon the slab as he spoke, and the next one to it, as before, rose slowly and revealed the riches in the stone sepulcher.

And instinctively the men obeyed, recognizing in the strange man a ruling spirit, but Evan, not wishing his authority cast aside, said insolently:

"You assume too much authority here, senor, for one who has not the power to back it up."

Instantly Kyd, as I will now call him, he having buried forever the name of Kenton Cavanaugh in the grave of the past—wheeled upon the outlaw lieutenant, his eyes burning, and said:

"By the Cross, sirrah, if you dare to dispute my authority, you'll curse the day that you were born; this treasure was my father's, but I give it to the crew of the lugger, to be divided among you; the vessel and the crew were my father's and I am his heir, and woe be to the man that disputes my inheritance; for right soon will I show him that I am indeed the son of my father, Red Hurltel. Bear a hand here, men, and to the boat with this treasure."

The men sprang forward to obey, for they felt that they stood in the presence of their master, but Evan, unheeding the warning, and believing that his crew would defend him, cried out:

"To dispute my authority, young sir, is to quarrel with me, and I'll punish thy insolence as it deserves."

He had stepped boldly forward as he spoke, and as the words left his lips, and before he could resist, he was seized in a grasp that was as

though iron bands encircled him, and the next instant he was hurled upon the stone flooring with a force that caused every bone in his body to crack.

The men fell back, and stood glancing at Carlo, and the other sub-officer, but they spoke not a word, and once more the ringing order came:

"To the lugger with this treasure, or, do you wish me to teach you that I am master here?"

It was evident from the hasty way in which they sprung to obey, and bent over into the vault, grabbing at the bags and keys, that they needed no second lesson, while Carlo, as if to hide his shame at allowing a stranger to utterly ignore him, knelt over his superior, as he lay prone and motionless upon the stone pave, and said:

"Evan is dead, senor."

"I know it," was the calm reply, and then through the vaulted chambers rung such a wild, mocking laughter, that every pirate there cowered down in dread and began rattling off his prayers, as though he expected his Satanic Majesty to appear before him.

"Cowards! it is but an old crazy hag that frightens you," said Kyd, sternly.

"Ha! ha! ha! well, boy, you have begun well, and proven thyself well worthy of thy father: ha! ha! ha! son of Red Hurltel, success attend thee, sorrow and death follow in thy wake."

The mocking laughter, and the strange words came from far back in the gloomy dungeon, and the men needed no second bidding to shoulder their precious loads, and beat a hasty retreat from the dismal spot, without giving a glance at their dead lieutenant.

Closely did Kyd follow them, and reaching the stairs he sprung into the stern-sheets, giving his orders in a way that none dare dispute.

A few moments more and he was upon the deck of the lugger, and without opposition he assumed command, the story of the scene in the dungeon in the castle being quickly whispered around.

Standing upon the high deck astern, he issued his orders in a way that proved he was a thorough seaman, and, as the boat's crew had done, the entire lugger's force recognized his leading spirit, and sprung to obey his commands with an alacrity that had not been seen since the death of Red Hurltel.

As the lugger forged through the waters, on her way to the sea, the eastern sky was growing gray with the approach of dawn, and the grief-stricken man, who so fearlessly and so recklessly had forced himself into the position held by his dead father, that father whom he had slain, turned his burning eyes up to Castle Cor, and like a wail broke from his lips the cry:

"Oh, God! when and where will all this end?"

But no answer came to his cry, and out upon the blue waters dashed the swift-sailing lugger, while her commander turned his gaze upon the receding shores, just lighting up with the rising sun, and murmured:

"Alas! the die is cast, and I drift upon the tide of destiny, wherever it may drive me; ay, from this day I am the Pirate, Kyd."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE WARNING OF THE WITCH.

WHEN it came to the ears of the Earl of Belmont of how his son had behaved to a guest of the castle, he was very wroth, and regretted having given him a letter to the king, asking for a commission, for he said:

"If the boy behaves in that manner toward one whom he believes an inferior, he is not fit to assume command of men, good sailor though he may be."

And yet, though angry with Lord Gerald for his unwarrantable conduct toward Kenton Cavanaugh, he was most anxious regarding his safety, when the storm swept down upon the sea, and he knew that he must be exposed to it.

Having learned of Lord Gerald's departure from the castle, and to be absent an unlimited time, Lady Grace, at the entreaties of her cousin, the earl and the countess, changed her determination of returning to Castle Greyhurs, and remained where she was, for most devotedly was she attached to the lovely Kate of Belmont.

And that night, as the storm-clouds swept down upon the scene, the inmates of the castle stood in awe watching its ravages, while a shriek went from the lips of the countess, when she saw the lightning stroke descend upon Castle Death.

"Alas! Castle Crag has received its death-blow, as did my poor, unfortunate brother," muttered the earl.

"Father! father! it is there, in that old ruin that Kenton Cavanaugh is tonight!" cried Lady Kate, and she made known all about the ride of the morning, and the promise of the young officer to meet Zebel, the Witch, that night an hour after sunset.

"I wish I had known this an hour before, my child, I would have ridden there in search of Lieutenant Cavanaugh, for no servant of this household would set foot in yonder ruin."

"God grant the stroke of lightning spared him," said Lady Grace.

"The morrow will tell us; but if it killed the old Witch I will not mourn, for my retainers are each day standing more in terror of the hag, and I wish I had some good excuse to rid the country of her."

"Yes, she is one to be dreaded, for I felt a chill come over me, when she turned her burning eyes upon me, as we passed her the other day while out driving," said the Countess of Belmont with a shudder.

"I sent servants to the beach after Cavanaugh, but they reported they could find nothing of him; but to-morrow I shall have diligent search made and bring him back to the castle, for I honor the youth greatly and the letters he brought me, speak of the high consideration in which the king and the admiralty hold him; I wish that Lord Gerald had half the manhood," said the earl, who had become an enthusiastic admirer of the young officer, who had so swiftly ascended the ladder of fame.

And all through that long dreary night, while that bitter, fearful story was being told, and strange scenes transpiring in Castle Death, Kate of Belmont lay tossing upon her pillow, thinking of the one, who, each moment was growing stronger in her love, and about whom she felt such anxiety, for, if the old ruin was terrible in the sunlight, what must it not be in the storm and darkness?

Shortly after the break of day the Earl of Belmont ordered his barge, and to the dismay of the dozen oarsmen, sprung into the stern, and told the helmsman to head for Castle Crag, for never would he call it by the name superstitious fear had fastened upon it.

Across the bay rowed the barge, rocking on the waves, not yet run down after the storm, and when he bade the man at the tiller to steer for the castle stairs, it looked for a moment as though there would be a mutiny in that well-trained crew.

"Howly St. Patrick! but is it yer swate silf, sir, that manes thim blissid words?" asked the helmsman.

"I do: steer for the castle stairs," was the stern reply.

"But the Witch, sir; the howly hag o' Satan."

"Curse the old hag!"

"So say I, sir; but she won't be cursed, but is after cursing; sure, sir, an' it's a swate sail along the coast this blissid morn."

"You have my orders, Michael Downie; do you intend to obey?"

"Yis, sir, I'll land you at thim stairs, if the Witch herself stands there to wilcome you; but its damned in Purgathory we'll become next Easter."

"I'll give you gold for your prayers, Michael; so give way with a will, my men."

The crew of the barge had been resting on their oars during this conversation between the earl and Michael Downie; but they now rowed on once more, and the boat soon touched the landing.

"Is not that the fishing skiff of old Dermot lying yonder against the shore?" asked the earl.

"It is, sir, and for a fact."

"Go and bring it to the barge, and two of you come with me," and the earl sprung ashore, his sword in hand, and followed by the two trembling oarsmen entered the castle.

From chamber to chamber he went until he had visited nearly every part of the castle, but no sign of human being did he find, and loud and long did the boatmen shout the name of Kenton Cavanaugh.

"The lightning dealt the sea tower a severe stroke; but it killed no one, that is certain, yet where is the youth?" said the earl, in a perplexed tone.

"I'm not afther knowin', sir; but I'm afther guessin' the devil has got him afore this, if he came here under the shades o' night," remarked Michael.

"Some harm has befallen him, I am assured; return at once to Castle Cor, and take the skiff in tow."

With an alacrity and display of muscle they had not used in coming over, the oarsmen bent to their oars and sent the barge flying over the water, yet, to the eyes of Kate and Grace who watched its coming, and saw the skiff in its wake, it seemed to creep.

Arriving at Castle Cor, the earl at once organized his servants into squads, and sent them forth to search for the lost young officer; but though he directed the large party to go to Castle Death and search it once more from vault to tower, there was not one of those detailed for this work that had the remotest idea of going there, and as soon as they were out of sight of Castle Cor they very coolly secreted themselves among the rocks, and went busily to work arranging the lies to tell upon their return, and one and all mentally swearing to throw in gratis a ghost-story, in which he was an actor.

Having seen the search-squads depart, and uttered a prayer for their success, Lady Kate and her cousin strolled out upon the lawn and into the park, where they seated themselves in a rustic arbor to comment again and again upon the mysterious disappearance of the young lieutenant.

And as they sat there together they did not see a human form coming with cat-like tread toward them.

But suddenly glancing up they beheld in the rustic doorway the strange, wild eyes of Zebel the Witch peering in upon them.

Both sprung to their feet in an instant, and the face of each paled; but remembering at once that they were in no danger so near the castle, and that the woman must know something of Kenton Cavanaugh, Lady Kate said, quickly:

"Ah, good mother, have you tidings of my father's guest, that you come hither?"

"And who is thy father's guest?" she asked in her cold, harsh tones.

"The one who rode with us to thy weird domain on yesterday; the one with whom thou didst make appointment to meet last night," eagerly asked Lady Kate.

"What should I know of the movements of men if they concern me not?"

"Then you have not seen him?"

"Yes, he had the courage to come to my desolate abode, yonder ruined castle."

"And he went from there?"

"Yes: he liked not the tale I poured into his ears, and he left me."

"But he has not returned to the castle, and we are alarmed about him."

"Seek him not of me, maiden, for he left as he came."

"Not so, woman, for he went in his skiff, and it was found at the castle this morning and brought back by my father," said Kate Belmont, haughtily.

In spite of her nerve the Witch started, for she had forgotten about the coming of the youth in his skiff; but she answered with scorn:

"Does the proud Earl of Belmont so concern himself about a low-born youth, that he dares go to Death Castle to search for him?"

"My father dare go anywhere, woman, and his duty to his guest, who left in anger, at an insult offered by my thoughtless brother, caused him to seek Lieutenant Cavanaugh to repair the injury."

"You are strangely interested in this low-born youth, Lady Kate of Castle Cor," suddenly said the woman, and the eyes of the maiden flashed as she retorted:

"Lady Kate of Castle Cor allows no insinuations as to her conduct, and do you possess the power of the Evil One or not, I warn you to keep a more civil tongue."

"My tongue wears no fetters, maiden: it is as free as my soul."

"Ah, woman, would to God that thou wert different; but 'tis said of thee that thou dost revel in doing evil."

"Ha! ha! ha! you are right, Lady Kate of Belmont: to make others suffer is my joy."

"And hast thou made him suffer?"

It was Lady Grace who spoke, and in her quick, earnest way.

"To whom do you refer?" she asked.

"If thou hast the power thou claimest, then why should I tell?"

"True, Lady Grace: you need not tell, for I know that thou referrest to him whom men call Kenton Cavanaugh: ay, did I make him suffer, and as men never suffer but once in a lifetime, or else madness would seize upon their brain and tear reason from its throne."

She spoke earnestly, and Kate Belmont cried out:

"Woman! woman! what hast thou done to Kenton Cavanaugh?"

"Dost thou love him, Kate of Castle Cor?"

"How dare you ask me that?" cried the maiden, indignantly.

"Zebel the Witch dare do anything, girl; but why need I ask, for well I know, as I read it in thy face."

"Ay, thou dost love that brave, bonnie youth: thy heart has no horizon beyond which thy love can disappear: but Hope, the star of thy love, beckons thee to ruin: Hope, the beacon of thy life, glimmers across breakers, hidden from thee now, but upon which thou wilt dash to wreck and ruin."

"Be warned, and tear out the germ of love; for it is but a serpent that will be nursed to life, and then strike thee with its fatal fangs: be warned, for Love and gold sway the world, girl, but they are twin devils to drag it down to ruin and death."

"Strange, fearful woman, in Heaven's name! what mean you?" cried Lady Kate, who with Lady Grace, was deeply impressed with the words and manner of the woman.

"If I have made thee miserable, Kate of Castle Cor, I am content; but let me add one more brand to the burning—thou wilt never see thy lover more."

Without another word she turned and strode away, while, with bitter grief in their hearts the two maidens hastened back to the castle, to make known the dire prophecy of Zebel the Witch.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A SURPRISE.

THE valiant crowd of searchers for the lost officer, who had been picked men, specially detailed to go to Castle Death, and go through

every part of the ruin, very complacently went to sleep in a secluded glen, about half-way between the home of Hurler of the Red Hand, and Castle Cor.

At last one of the number awoke, and, observing that the sun was casting long shadows, deemed it time to awaken his companions, and warn them that it was time to return and report to the earl, not what they had, but what they had not done.

"Arouse ye, my honeys, or ther shadows o' night will be afther crapin' upon us, and thin look out for Mither Zebel the Witch."

His words brought all upon their feet in a twinkling, and uneasy glances were hastily cast around, for they had been dreaming of the dreaded old woman.

"Will now, mavourneens, it's a loikely lie we must be afther tilling the masther."

"You're right, my darlint; what shall it be?"

"I'm afther bein' spokesman, my darlints, and I'll say to the masther:

"Masther dear, we wint to Castle Dith, an' we wint from ther bottom to ther top, 'ach one of us dividin' himsilf so as to kape a good eye over iverrything; but, masther dear, though we was not afther diskiverin' the young gintlemin so foine, we saw the ould beldame of a she-devil, sir, an' we gave her sich a hot time, thet she runned up to the tall tower an' jumped clane off, disappearing loike in a flame o' red smoke."

"That's a beautiful lie, it is, Barney, my darlint, but it's naded it is, an' may God forgive yer it, an' ef He don't ther praste will."

"I'm afther wishin' we'd hev gone for Father O'Hagerty, and had him go with us, and thin the ould Witch would be afther hidin' her ould white hid in—"

"Who is it you are talking about, fools?"

With the stern question there suddenly bounded into the midst of the intended circle of shirkers, none other than the very subject of their conversation.

But, had it been a bombshell of the present age, dropping among them, it would not the more effectually have scattered them, for in every direction went the frightened Irishmen, not one of them looking out for his fellow-man, but attending strictly to the business of making himself scarce with the utmost dispatch.

"Cowards! hold! or I will lay my curse on ye," she cried in loud accents, and two of those nearest to her, and who heard the full venom of her words, came to a sudden halt, and with their backs still toward her, but glancing over their shoulders, they stood muttering prayers and crossing themselves fervently.

"What do ye here, fools?"

"Oh! we was afther stopping a bit, sweet leddy, to hould a consultation."

"I am Zebel the Witch of Castle Death," she said in a ringing voice.

"Oh faith, and we know thet, Liddy Witch," answered one of the trembling men.

"Then if you do not tell me true, Evil you shall never eschew."

"Oh murther and the Mither o' Moses! we are did min intirely, Dinnis."

"Yis, Corwin, she'll be afther puttin' ther spell on us," cried the other.

"I know your business, fools, so speak out."

"Oh, it's much that yer know, my jewil."

"You have been to Castle Death in search of the young fisher lad, who has become a gentler?"

"Oh, do you moind that, Dinnis? she knows where we have been," evasively said Corwin.

"She knows a dale, mavourneen," uncompromisingly answered Dennis.

"But you found not the gentler there?"

"Do you moind that, how she tills it all, Corwin?"

"I do, mavourneen."

"But you saw strange sights, and heard sounds in the old ruin?"

"So strange, old mither, that we all crossed ourselves, belavin' you to be there."

"Liar! you have not been near the castle; you thought to deceive me, but you cannot, and woe betide you for the little game," she said, severely.

"Och hone, Dinnis, it's gone we are now intirely," groaned Corwin, crossing himself vigorously all the while.

"The Lord's will be done," muttered Dennis, muttering *pater noster*.

"I've a mind to touch you with my Evil Wand," and she held forth the stick menacingly, and down upon their knees went both men, Dennis muttering;

"The Howly Cross protict us."

Enjoying their fright for a moment, the Witch suddenly pointed in the direction of Castle Cor, and, as though she were starting them upon a foot-race, cried in a loud tone:

"Go!"

And go they did, for they were off like deers and it did indeed become a foot-race, with Dennis slightly leading, and Corwin praying to him not to leave him, and ever and anon glancing over his shoulder expecting to see the Witch in pursuit.

And old Zebel, rejoicing in the fear of others, laughed mockingly and cried:

"Oh! a right joyous thing it is to make

others suffer, ha! ha! ha! Faith have they in their religion and their prayers, yet let one come whom they believe allied to the Evil One, and they tremble and whine like the veriest curs under the master's lash.

"By the Cross! I would not be surprised if they ran all the way to Castle Cor."

And the Witch was right, they did; and more, the rest of the party, who had so rapidly dispersed when surprised by the woman, had met on the highway shortly after, and were not tarrying as they journeyed homeward, suddenly discovered Dennis and Corwin coming on like the wind, and with one accord they bounded forward at a pace that was marvelous, for well-fed, lazy loungers about the castle.

And if the old Witch could have heard the stories they told about her, she would have believed that she was the Evil One himself.

But the champions, in the lying tournament, were Dennis and Corwin, as soon as they found strength and breath enough to talk.

CHAPTER XXX.

LADY GRACE'S ADVENTURE.

HAD Zebel the Witch, who rejoiced in frightening superstitious people, and enjoyed the misery of others, known what was transpiring at Cor Castle, she would have been less jubilant as she went toward her weird home, or retreat, and felt ill at ease.

But not possessing the powers she laid claim to, and which, two centuries ago, were firmly believed in, Zebel reached the old ruin, and following a habit she never neglected, looked cautiously around her, ere she slowly ascended the castle wall, by means of the rough projections of the stones.

At the height of thirty feet she came to a window, from which the glass had disappeared, and into this she passed, and found herself in a small chamber that displayed an air of comfort not expected, when one knew that the castle had been uninhabited for years.

It was evidently the room intended for the priest, or father confessor of the castle, when such a luxury was needed by the master, for it opened into what had once been the chapel, but the entire flooring of which had fallen in upon the floor below, leaving no mode of egress, or ingress, except the way by which the woman had come.

A rich velvet rug was upon the floor of the little room, a divan that served as a bed, several cooking utensils upon the small hearth, and then a perfect museum of curiosities, from a human skull to a cimeter of rare workmanship.

Taking from a box some edibles, the Witch set about preparing her evening meal, which was of the most frugal kind, and eaten more from necessity, to judge from her manner, than from any pleasure she took in the repast.

Seating herself in the window, which was in the wing overlooking the bay and Castle Cor, the lonely and strange woman commenced, as was her custom, to commune with herself aloud.

An hour or more she sat thus, and the sun was almost resting upon the horizon, and the evening balmy and delightful, yet exerting no influence over her spirits, which were wild and wayward.

Suddenly she started, and bent her head in the attitude of listening, for a strange sound had come to her ears.

"Burn the accursed hag!"

Was it a wonder that even her brave face turned pale at such words?

"She's a witch, and should die!"

"Burn the old rookery, with her in it."

"Death to the Witch!"

And similar cries were heard, and the voices grew nearer and nearer until around the wing of the castle, she beheld from her retreat the Earl of Belmont, accompanied by a cavalcade of nobles, and followed by a hundred or more of the peasantry, armed with sticks, muskets and whatever else they could seize for the expedition against Zebel the Witch.

There was no mistaking the cries, no mistaking the intention of the crowd; they meant death to the weird woman, and death of the worst, most horrible kind, for their passions once aroused, she knew that they would burn her at the stake for a witch with the utmost cheerfulness.

The Earl of Belmont and some of the gentry might attempt to send her to prison; but the peasants would never listen to reason, now that they had an opportunity to free the country from one they so greatly feared, and what they would do with her she well knew.

With that immense crowd she knew her curses and her pretended charms and incantations would avail nothing; and it was no wonder the poor, guilty, hunted creature sunk down upon the floor of her little chamber, and trembled in agony of spirit.

That she was held responsible for the disappearance of Kenton Cavanaugh she well knew, for his promise to meet her there the night before, his skull having been found at the castle stairs, her ambiguous words to the two mai-

dens, and, in fact, worse than all, that the young man could nowhere be found, was against her.

Into the old ruin spread the crowd, but in all their search they kept in large parties, so great was their terror of the old hag, and at last she heard a wild cry from the vaults, where some had penetrated with lanterns.

Their shouts and words told her what had happened.

"They have found the blood on the pavement from that wretch the boy killed; lucky for me I threw the body into the sea and let the tide carry it off," she said, in a trembling voice; but the moment after she cried, as other words reached her:

"No, no, it was wrong in me to throw the body into the sea, for now they would little believe my story of the pirate vessel being here, and that he went with it. Bah! they would not believe me anyhow," and again she sunk down by the window and listened.

Around the castle had been stationed a cordon of sentinels, those of the crowd who had been armed with muskets, and she knew that escape was impossible, so must rely upon the secrecy of her chamber, whose presence no one would suspect, believing that the chapel, the flooring of which had fallen in, occupied the whole of that wing.

As the sun went down and the shadows increased, even the nobles accompanying the Earl of Belmont huddled more closely together, and the servants stood in a compact mass together, those on the outer edge of the crowd envying those who were in the center.

At last Zebel distinctly heard the words of the earl:

"We will return now; but in the morning we will come back, and the old Witch shall be found if we take the castle down rock by rock."

A wild cheer greeted the earl's words, and then they all moved away, at first slowly, but more rapidly as they went along, as those in the rear wished to get in front, and those in advance cared not to get behind.

With grim joy old Zebel watched them depart, and then said savagely: "Ay, depart, ye knaves of Satan, with my curse, and it will be a gala day for you when you burn Zebel the Witch," and she shook her hand menacingly at the departing crowd, now hidden by the gloom.

Quietly she set about preparations for taking her departure, for she knew to remain there was certain death, and go she must; but where?

"Homeless, kindredless, hunted down and a witch, oh! where can I go?" broke from her pallid lips in pitiful cry.

Suddenly she started, and stood trembling in fear, as she had made many another tremble.

"Zebel!"

The name was called out in clear, ringing tones, yet she made no answer.

"Zebel!"

"Great God! can it be an angel?" and dropping upon her knees, she drew out the gold crucifix she still carried in her bosom, and began to kiss it wildly, and do what she had not done for years—pray.

"Zebel! it is I—Lady Grace."

Instantly the woman was herself again, and looking from the window beheld a horsewoman, and alone.

"Why have you come here, girl?" she asked sternly.

"To save you, for to-morrow the people will surely burn you at the stake," answered Lady Grace with pity in her tones.

"And how does the fate of Zebel the Witch affect Lady Grace of Greyhurst Castle?" scornfully asked the woman.

"Years ago, when a little child, you passed by Glenshield Castle, where I was visiting, and you came to the rescue of my little brother and myself, who had upset our boat in the cove and were drowning."

"Ha! I remember! and you are that little girl I saved, for the boy drowned?" eagerly said Zebel.

"Yes, you saved my life, but my poor little brother went down before my eyes; often have I wished to repay that debt, but only yesterday did I know who it was that I owed my life to, for you disappeared just after the accident."

"And how do you know now that I was the one?"

"Yours is not a face to forget when once seen."

"And you would save me now?"

"Yes; you can disguise yourself in this clothing I have brought you, and come on to the arbor where you saw Lady Kate and myself to-day; there you will find this horse; he is mine, so take him and seek safety in flight, for by daybreak he will carry you far, far from here, for he is as fleet as the wind and as lasting as a hound."

For a moment the woman hesitated, for she deemed it a trap to ensnare her; but banishing the thought, when she remembered that Lady Grace came alone, and by night, and that she did really owe her her life, she descended the rough wall of the castle and approached her.

"Lady Grace of Greyhurst, you are a noble woman, and you have taught old Zebel the Witch that the world is not wholly bad."

"I have but done my duty; but I beg you to tell me one thing."

"Name it."

"Have you harmed Lieutenant Cavanaugh?"

The old spirit of the woman broke out at the question, and she said sneeringly:

"Lieutenant Cavanaugh," but changing her mood instantly, she continued:

"Harmed him bodily I have not; harmed him in heart and brain I have; but now I will tell you nothing, yet, within the arbor, where you leave this horse, you will find a bit of paper, and it will tell you the fate of the man you seek knowledge of, and it will be the truth."

"I thank you, Zebel; and he is not dead?" eagerly said the maiden.

"He is not dead."

"It is well; here is the bundle of clothing, and this horse you will find at the arbor; and I need not tell you that any moment lost is fatal to you, for the peasantry are rising to-night on all sides, and to-morrow, if taken, no power can save you from the stake."

"I know it well; and that I am not burned to you will I owe it; but I will not say that I will pray for you, maiden, for my prayers would fall as curses; I will not say bless you, for that would bring you ill-fortune; yet I will tell you, that the only time in long years that Zebel the Witch has been made to feel that she had a heart is this night, and you have touched it—farewell."

She turned away, but Lady Grace recalled her.

"Stay, here is a purse of gold for you."

"Girl, I need no gold; I have jewels that would ransom a prince, and gold sufficient."

"Then farewell, and may your life be different, Zebel; remember, I shall look for the paper in the arbor."

"I shall be there."

Lady Grace waved her hand, turned her horse, and away bounded the splendid animal, his rapid hoof-strokes causing the lowly dwellers in the roadside houses to believe that Sir Hurltel's ghost was abroad on one of the mad rides of long years before.

But without attracting attention, Lady Grace, who had secretly taken her horse from the stable, dismounted at the rustic arbor, secured the animal, and entered the castle unseen, and with her daring night adventure unknown.

But all through the night she was most restless and rising with the sun sought the arbor in the castle park.

The steed was gone, and upon the wall, pinned there with a sharpened peg of wood, was the promised paper.

In her trembling hands she grasped it, and read:

"Him whom thou wouldst know the fate of, has cast honor to the dogs, and the black flag to the breeze. Beware of him!"

"What can she mean? No, no, no! it is false, for Kenton Cavanaugh could never be a—pirate, no! he could never become the guilty thing she would make him," and burying her face in her hands, Lady Grace burst into tears.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE CRUISER AND THE PIRATE.

JUST prior to the close of the seventeenth century, the king appointed the Earl of Belmont Governor of the then Province of New York, with his head-quarters at New Amsterdam, now the great American metropolis, but, two centuries ago, a town not larger than a score of its massive squares of to-day.

As the coast of America at that time was infested with audacious buccaneers, whose voyages extended from Maine to the Carolinas, the earl was ordered by the king to fit out a swift-sailing yacht to carry him across the ocean, and which also might be used in the Colonial waters as a cruiser against the ruthless pirates.

But in those days delays were many, advantages for building vessels were not what they are now, and it was two years after his appointment as governor before the Earl of Belmont set sail for the New World.

And in that time the seas had been the scene of many a daring attack, upon even armed vessels, by the free rovers, and the navies of Spain and England were kept busy hunting down the merciless corsairs, that flaunted their sable flag with reckless impunity.

Hardly had the rejoicing begun over the death of the far-famed Hurltel of the Red Hand, before another chieftain sprung suddenly into existence and spread terror along the whole English coast, defying the cruisers sent in pursuit of him. And he was known as *The Kyd*. Finding the work laid out for him by Zebel, the Witch of Death Castle, already accomplished, Lord Gerald of Castle Cor cruised about under a general commission to drive piracy from the high seas, and having made several captures of buccaneer crafts, he had received the personal thanks of his king, and, in his own estimation, had become a terror to the outlaw rovers of the deep.

As one of his captures had been made shortly after setting sail in the really trim craft that had been placed under his command, not twen-

ty leagues from Castle Cor, he took the opportunity to tow his prize into the bay that his father might see what a daring son he had, and also to use this, his first exploit, as a means of winning back the love of his cousin, Grace, of Greyhurst Castle.

Saluting the castle with his guns, the earl in turn saluted with the small battery mounted upon the battlement, and dipped the Belmont flag in honor of the coming hero, while even Lady Grace forgave the past and welcomed the wanderer home again.

But the haughty Lord Gerald had another motive in visiting the little castle-guarded bay, and that was to see the Witch of Castle Death and make known to her that Hurltel of the Red Hand was no more. Though he knew that the death of that famous pirate must needs be stale news by the time he reached Castle Cor, he wished to prove to her that his intention to hunt down the real heir to the earldom had proven good, not that he cared what the Witch might think on the subject, but he had laid a plan to entrap her, and, once in his power at sea, her life was to be the forfeit of the secret she held, and thus two, who might come between him and the inheritance of a proud title and vast estates, would be beyond giving him trouble.

The Witch disposed of, the old nurse, who also had the secret locked in her bosom, would be the next victim, and then Lord Gerald would feel secure.

It was therefore with a dread of evil that the young officer heard that the Witch had not been seen since the mysterious disappearance and supposed death of Kenton Cavanaugh.

He hoped, with many others, that she was dead, for all that was inflammable in Castle Death had been set on fire by the witch-hunters, and only the stone walls and towers remained, blackened with smoke, yet still grand in their ruin.

True, the steed of Lady Grace had been missed from the Castle Cor stables, but that was set down to some thieving peasant, for that discreet maiden shed no light upon the subject, and kept her own secret with a tenacity, that, in a woman, was sublime.

Being disappointed in really the main object that had brought him into the bay, and failing in his desire to win back the haughty Lady Grace to her engagement with him, Lord Gerald set sail with his prize in no very amiable humor, for a hero, either with himself or the world at large.

Determined to win a name that would yet make the haughty maiden look kindly on him, he scoured the seas in quest of foes, and, as I have made known, made several captures of pirate crafts, the crews of which were promptly strung up to the yard-arm, a proceeding which quickly gained for him a fame that caused the free rovers to fly from his well-known cruiser in terror.

Thus a year and a half passed away, and the earl and his family, were daily expecting the arrival in the bay, of the beautiful armed yacht that was to carry them to America, and over which, a young and distinguished officer from the colonies had been placed in command.

Just as good-nights were being said in the grand assembly room of the castle, one beautiful moonlight night, the deep boom of a heavy gun made the windows rattle and caused a flutter of intense excitement.

"It is the yacht, and that is her salute," cried the earl, and, as he spoke there burst forth a terrible discharge of artillery, which caused him to exclaim:

"No; that is not a salute, but a broadside; hark! it is a combat—come!"

The countess and the two maidens quickly followed him to the outer terrace, where already the servants had assembled in alarm, and there not a league away they descried two vessels, slowly approaching each other, and firing rapidly, the one upon the other.

"Yes, it is a combat; and, by the Cross! it is Lord Gerald's cruiser; bravo! bravo for the boy!"

The servants took up the enthusiasm and three hearty cheers were given for the young noble, while every eye was eagerly strained upon the combat, which each moment became hotter and fiercer.

"Lord Gerald has run his foe down upon the coast, to give us the spectacle of a naval engagement," said the earl, enthusiastically.

"God grant his life be spared," cried the countess, eagerly.

"Ay, God grant it, wife; but our brave sailors and soldiers must take the chances of life and death; ha! that was a good broadside, my boy! a few more like that, and—Good God! do I believe my own sight?"

"Yes, father, Gerald's vessel is flying," said Lady Kate, while Lady Grace replied, and with scorn in her voice:

"His vessel is the larger of the two; he surely cannot be running from a foe that he is able to destroy."

"But he is, by our Lady! ha! how that devil pursues him; ply your guns, Lord Gerald! pour in your hot shot!" and the earl was wild with excitement.

But landward flow the king's cruiser, seeking

a haven in the bay, and astern, under clouds of canvas, and gaining rapidly, came the enemy, whatever he might be, while both vessels were keeping up a hot fire, the one from his bow, the other from his stern guns.

"She gains rapidly on the cruiser, and—did you see her flag then?" and the voice of the earl dropped almost to a whisper, and still greater pallor crept over every face, for the wind coming from ahead, flaunted the ensign out flat, and the flashes of the gun now showed it to be the black flag of a pirate.

With eager eyes and bated breath, all on the terrace stood watching the running fight, and a chill of horror went to every heart, when they beheld the pirate craft lay the cruiser aboard, and heard the wild yells of the buccaneers as they sprung upon the decks, and the rattle of small-arms and clash of steel against steel.

But then, above the din of carnage arose a ringing voice:

"Cease firing, all!"

Instantly the silence of death followed.

"What could it mean?" the pirates asked each other.

"What could it mean?" the crew of the cruiser questioned among themselves.

"What did it mean?" was the query of the earl and all on the battlement of Castle Cor.

The answer came soon, and in the same ringing tones:

"Back to your schooner, buccaneers! this is not the vessel I seek."

And back to their decks clambered the pirates; their vessel swung away from the prize they had really taken, and away under clouds of snowy duck stood the mysterious craft, to the joy of the cruiser's men, and the astonishment of all who saw the strange act.

And into the bay put the cruiser, dropping her anchor close inshore. A few moments after Lord Gerald, flushed with the heat of battle, and excited over what had occurred, came up to the castle.

In an embarrassed way he received the welcome extended to him, but as to the strange conduct of his victor could offer no explanation whatever; yet said:

"Recognizing, when we drew nearer, who was my foe, I knew that it was madness to fight, though in men and guns I outnumbered him; hence I sought safety in flight."

"We saw that, and wondered why a stronger vessel should fly from a weaker one," said Lady Grace, with a slight sneer upon her pretty mouth.

"The reason is, that yonder is the craft of *The Kyd*, my severe cousin of Greyhurst."

"What! that merciless and red-handed devil, who has gained the title of King of the Black Flag?" cried the earl.

"The same, sir; he has defeated cruisers twice his strength, and seems to combat and kill for the simple love of imbruing his hands in blood."

"It is said that he has never been beaten off by an enemy, and, if he cannot with his guns make a vessel strike her flag to him, he will run down and board her, and then the scene that follows is awful, and beggars description," remarked the earl.

"Do you wonder then, sir, that I did not wish to meet him?" asked the young noble, hoping to find excuse for his lack of courage.

"I do, of course, Lord Gerald, for I cannot understand a naval officer shunning a conflict where the chances are equal even against him, and yet your own admission proves you were the stronger; but may I ask, why *The Kyd* so kindly spared your vessel and your crew? Was it because he found a foe unworthy of his steel?"

Lord Gerald winced noticeably under this hot shot turned upon him by Lady Grace; but replied quietly:

"I know not; my men were crying for quarter, when he suddenly advanced upon me, and I prepared to meet him: but he stopped short, turned away, and then gave his order to cease firing, and five minutes after he sailed away."

"I'll wager my inheritance that it wasn't through fear," was the reply of Lady Grace, as she said good-night and left the room, a strange expression upon her beautiful face, and one the young officer neither understood nor liked.

Once in her own chamber she glanced out of the window and gazed upon the white sails of the flying pirate and murmured:

"After all, can Zebel the Witch have been right? It looks strange indeed, this sparing Lord Gerald, and I dread, alas! from all I have heard, that Kenton Cavanaugh is the one who has won the name of *The Kyd*; and if he be, it were better far that he had met his death in the castle, as all believe."

"Ah me! he be what he may, his secret I will keep locked up in my own heart."

CHAPTER XXXII.

A MAIDEN'S WHIM.

WHETHER it was that Lord Gerald of Castle Cor was sick of the sea, or that he dreaded a second meeting on blue water with *The Kyd*, is

not known; but certain it is he resigned his commission, and, shortly after his engagement on the Irish coast, returned to his home to settle down to the life of a country gentleman, and hold full sway, for his parents, accompanied by his sister and Lady Grace, sailed for the New World soon after his arrival, in the beautiful and fleet yacht *Bloodhound*, which the earl had had built for special service on the American coast, and armed and equipped to perfection.

A stanch craft, heavily armed, well manned, and with princely accommodations, the little party anticipated a pleasant voyage across the ocean, for, as her commander, Clement St. Vane, a handsome, dashing young officer of twenty-seven, said:

"What we cannot whip, my lord, we can run away from, so that is a consolation."

Several weeks had passed away since they bade farewell to Erin's green shores, and no incident of mark had happened, and the Earl of Belmont was congratulating himself that the swift yacht would reach its destination without a chase or a combat, when, from the masthead rung out the always startling cry:

"Sail, ho!"

The Earl of Belmont, the countess and the two maidens were on the deck, and all looked anxiously for the stranger, for they were not very far from the coast of America, and were more likely to sight a buccaneer than an honest craft.

"What do you make her out?" called out Captain St. Vane to the man at the masthead.

"She is one of those American-built schooners, sir, and is dead ahead and coming toward us with a nimble foot."

The stranger was soon visible from the deck, and as she raised to her hull, Captain St. Vane hailed the masthead:

"Ho! aloft!"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"What do you make of her now, my man?"

"A schooner of three hundred tons, and heavily armed; I can see her decks plainly, and they are crowded with men."

"A pirate, I'll wager," said Captain St. Vane in a low tone, while Lady Grace, who accidentally overheard the remark, turned deadly pale, seeing which he continued:

"Do not dread danger, Lady Grace, for this craft has a pair of heels she can throw in the face of any buccaneer that floats, and if she could not, we have a crew who can give an account of themselves in action, either at the guns or close quarters."

"Suppose it be *The Kyd*?" answered Lady Grace significantly.

"Ah! I have longed to meet that King of the Black Flag, and ere long I shall do so, for this vessel was built, Lady Grace, armed and manned to cruise more especially against that noted pirate, the earl informs me."

"Then your wish will be realized, Captain St. Vane, for yonder schooner flies the flag of *The Kyd*," said the maiden, firmly.

"Why, Lady Grace, how is it that your eyes can detect what that vessel is?" asked the captain in surprise.

"I live on the coast, sir, and know well the rig of vessels, and one such as that is I never saw but once before, and that was in action, and by moonlight; yet I recognize the craft known as the *Galley Slave*."

Hardly had she ceased speaking when an old seaman approached, and saluting politely, said:

"Captain, I have seen yonder craft twice afore; I was on Lord Gerald's cruiser, as fought her near Castle Cor, and it are the *Galley Slave* o' that murdering pirate Captain Kyd."

"All right, my man," and Clement St. Vane turned to the maiden.

"Lady Grace, you are doubtless right, for the craft has a suspicious look, and I'll see what his intentions are," and he gave an order to change the course of the yacht about half a dozen points.

But instantly the schooner changed with her so as to head her off.

"Aha! he means to get a closer look at us; let her fall off until she has a free sheet, quarter-master," said the young officer, and the order being obeyed, the stranger instantly followed suit, and yet held on so as to head the yacht off at a given point, if it neither changed its course.

But, as the schooner fell off too, a cry arose from the decks of the yacht:

"*The Black Flag!*"

The men, at this cry, went silently to the guns, and in an instant all was earnest preparation for action.

"What mean these warlike movements, St. Vane?" asked the Earl of Belmont, earnestly.

"Yonder vessel is a pirate, sir," was the quiet answer.

"But you have no idea of engaging her?"

"Not unless necessary, my lord."

"You must make it *necessary*, Captain St. Vane, for there is too much at stake aboard this vessel, to risk an action with a red-handed pirate," said the earl, firmly.

"I understand you, my lord, I will see if we can drop his company."

"Do so, and after you land us in New York you can cruise for pirates, and I will accompany you, if need be, but not now, not now, St. Vane."

The yacht was now bowling swiftly along under pressure of a six-knot breeze, but it was plain that the schooner was outsailing her.

"Crowd on canvas, Mr. Kent, for we must drop that ugly customer," said Captain St. Vane to his lieutenant.

"It is *The Kyd*, sir."

"True, and therefore, that much more reason we should fly."

"We look to have the heavier metal, sir, and doubtless the larger crew, and could—"

"I must be obeyed, Mr. Kent, for there is freight on this yacht that must never be risked in action."

"Ah! I beg pardon, Captain St. Vane; I had forgotten the ladies," and the officer went forward to give the necessary orders, and soon, under her increased sail, the fleet vessel was making ten knots out of a breeze that was about seven.

But the schooner also set more canvas, and still not only held her own, but gained.

"What is the matter, St. Vane, for yonder schooner is sailing faster than we are?" asked the earl, anxiously.

"I do not know, my lord, for we are doing our best, unless—"

"Unless what, sir?"

"We put about and run into the wind's eye; that is the yacht's best point of sailing, and I've yet to see a craft that cannot be left astern by her."

"Then try her at that; for that fellow will soon use his guns and should he cripple you, there can be but one alternative, and that I wish to avoid."

"As I do, my lord, under present circumstances," answered the captain, and his ringing orders sent the crew to their posts; the sharp bows swept around; the sails were trimmed close, and lay as flat and hard as boards, and away dashed the pretty craft, laying well over and leaving a foaming wake astern.

But, as though on a pivot, the schooner also swept round, and it took but a few minutes to prove that she was getting more knots to the hour out of the breeze blowing, than was the yacht.

"Well, my lord, our yacht has met her match."

"Her superior, it seems, Captain St. Vane, but God grant he is our superior only in sailing, for it has got to come to an action, I fear," answered the earl, sadly.

And each moment but increased this opinion, for steadily the schooner gained, although the yacht had every foot of canvas spread that would draw.

Anxiously all on the king's cruiser watched the vessel creeping upon them, until at last Clement St. Vane called out:

"Clear for action!"

Hardly had the words left his lips, when a puff of smoke burst from the schooner's sharp bows, and a shot flew over the deck of the yacht.

"Show your colors, Mr. Kent, and if that don't satisfy him we'll make the British Lion growl," said Clement St. Vane, and the ensign of Great Britain arose to the yacht's peak: but a moment after a shot from the schooner cut through it, leaving a wide rent in the bunting.

"He's a crack shot, my lord, and I think we'd better put about and meet him half-way," said the captain, eager for the fray, now that he saw that it must come.

"What, Grace, you on deck?" and the earl turned in surprise upon his niece, as she came forward, a roll of silk in her hand, while she said pleasantly:

"I have come to ask Captain St. Vane to humor me in a whim."

"This is no time, dear niece, to—"

"It is just the time, dear uncle: Captain St. Vane; will you haul down your ensign and raise this to the peak, at the same time changing the course of your vessel so as to let the pirate recognize what it is?"

The young captain looked mystified, while the earl said:

"By all that is holy, Grace, what do you mean?"

"Just what I said, uncle Belmont: for this flag to be raised at the peak."

"It is my own flag of Castle Cor, and the Belmont arms."

"I know it, uncle: ah! there is another shot, and—well aimed," she coolly added, as it went through the mizzen-sail.

Seeing by the manner of the maiden that she had some reason for the strange request, the young captain took the roll of silk, hauled down the British colors, and attaching the other to the halyards, hauled it to the peak.

The effect was magical; ere the flag of Castle Cor had fluttered half a minute to the breeze, the schooner wore around quickly and sped away before the wind like a frightened bird, while the earl, the yacht's officers, and the crew stared in amazement at the maiden, and then at the flying pirate craft.

"Grace, in God's name, what does this mean?" asked the astonished and delighted earl.

"It means, uncle, that the flag of Castle Cor has more terror for *The Kyd* than the ensign of Great Britain," was the quiet reply.

"If yonder is another enemy, may he feel the same terror," and the Earl of Belmont pointed to another sail directly in their course.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE CAPTAIN'S STORY.

THE strange sail seen by the Earl of Belmont, and which in the excitement of the schooner's chase had been unnoticed, came fleetly along, and was discovered soon to be an English vessel of war, and one of the coast guard to New York harbor.

Turning to the Earl of Belmont, Captain St. Vane said:

"My lord, I have a great favor to ask of you."

"Name it, my dear captain."

"Yonder schooner is the *Galley Slave*, Kyd's vessel, and I may never have a better opportunity than the present of engaging him, and I would request that yourself and family board the cruiser, and have her carry you into New York harbor, while I give chase to the pirate."

"I'll faith I'll do it, St. Vane, for it would be a feather in your cap to take the famous rover, who of late, it seems, is devoting his attention to the American coast; and a good offset for me in the beginning of my gubernatorial duties," and while Captain St. Vane signaled the cruiser, the earl informed the ladies of his intention, and, strange to say, was met with opposition by Lady Grace; but seeing that her real intention was misunderstood, as dread for the safety of the yacht's handsome and gallant young captain, she said no more, and in an hour's time the transfer had been made to the larger and clumsy cruiser, of the earl's family, servants and luggage.

With wishes for success from all, and an additional score of men from the cruiser, Captain St. Vane stood away for the schooner, which was a little more than two leagues away, and, under easy sail continuing on the course she had been since so suddenly giving up the chase.

Crowding on sail, until she looked like a mass of white clouds skimming over the sea, the yacht went on in hot pursuit; but almost instantly sail after sail was spread on the schooner, and when night shut the two vessels out from the sight of those on the cruiser, who watched the chase so anxiously, it was evident that the pirate was gaining upon the king's cutter.

And with the darkness came on a gale, which increased in violence until the cruiser was compelled to send before it for safety, and thus go many miles off her direct course into New York harbor.

But, with the morning the storm broke away, and though the wind blew fresh, the sea was no longer lashed into a foaming caldron, and once more the cruiser headed for port.

"Come, ladies, all," cried the blunt old captain of the cruiser, "we'll sight the Highlands of Neversink about sunset, and you'll get a glimpse of the New World for the first time; hats the Old World, I assure you, and will one day be the greatest country on the globe."

The remark of the cruiser's captain brought even the countess on deck, and one and all of the passengers were not sorry that they would soon be safe on *terra firma*, and walked the deck with real enjoyment of the balmy afternoon, though of course all felt an anxiety about Capt. St. Vane, having met the pirate schooner in action.

"He'll never catch Kyd, if he once runs from him, ladies, for it is either run, or fight with that pirate; and if he makes up his mind which to do, he sticks to it," volunteered the captain, who had risen from the fore-castle to the quarter-deck.

"I thought he preferred fighting to running, Captain Dent," said the countess.

"He does, my lady, and those who have once tackled him, prefer fighting to running next time they met him: but why he ran from your cutter I cannot understand, as I'd hardly expect him to steer clear of me even although I carry two guns to his one and half again as many men."

"And is he the red-handed wretch they say he is?" asked Lady Kate.

"People lie about pirates as well as about church people, lady; but I'll answer you as I knew him, and it was about a year ago that I formed his acquaintance, and when he sailed a lugger that wasn't a beauty, but was awful nimble-footed; some say it was the same craft that bloody devil—begging your pardon, ladies—old Hurler of the Red Hand cruised in, but it may or may not be."

"But, as I was saying, I met him once, and I've come to remember it, for the schooner he is in now he got from us."

"The craft was built for a present to King William the Third, from the merchants of Boston, and was made as complete as vessel could be, and I was second officer, and Captain Lar-kin her commander."

"Well, ladies, and you, my lord, we sailed out of Boston with a hundred and ten men on board, and the craft was the idol of all, the crew, down to the cabin boy can tell you, when

we headed across the sea with our pretty plaything for good King Billy.

"We went along well the first day out, but just before dark we sighted a queer-looking craft, that some of the lads forward said was the lugger of Captain Kyd.

"Now we all wanted to do a big thing, and that was, carry to the king his beautiful vessel along with the pirate Kyd to hang, and we put about for the lugger, and when in range we opened, and then we kept it up.

"But bless your soul, ladies, and you, my lord, the pirate didn't return a shot, but came right down to grapple with us, not caring anything, so it seemed, about the iron hail we were pouring upon him.

"The wind was light, but he came on swiftly, his large lugger sails cut up terribly by our shot, and we could see the splinters fly when we struck his masts and bulwarks, and sometimes half a dozen men would go down together in a heap.

"But it mattered not to that murderous crew, for they never flinched, and I soon saw the reason, for they had a chief who didn't believe in dodging.

"There he stood by the helm, cool as you please, and as handsome as a portrait, and he kept his home eye on the crew, and the weather one on us.

"Our captain told the men to kill him, but it didn't do any good, for he kept his place, and in the hottest fire calmly raised his glass and looked at us, while I, looking at him, actually saw him smile as sweet as a lady, to a young man who stood near him, and to whom he spoke."

"Was The Kyd a young man?" asked Lady Grace, quietly.

"He was indeed, and the handsomest man I ever saw, lady; but to go on with my story: he just took the lugger's helm himself, and, though we poured in a terrible fire that made his vessel reel fearfully, he laid it alongside of us as skillfully as though it were a pleasure craft, and then over the sides he came, followed by his demoniacal crew.

"Well, ladies, our captain was killed, and about one-half of our crew went down, and then the lads cried for quarter, for they didn't believe they were fighting human beings, so terribly did the pirates fight.

"Now, ladies, I'm a good swordsman myself, though I say it as shouldn't, and I crossed blades with The Kyd, who came at me smiling; and such a smile! I never saw one like it before or since, for it was worse than a frown, I can tell you.

"Our blades crossed, and I haven't seen mine since, for it went thirty feet away into the sea, and I cried quarter, though I didn't expect to get it; but I did, and turning around he called out to his lieutenant:

"Call off the hounds, Valdez; the schooner's mine."

"And so it was, and a pretty property he had, too.

"Who commanded this schooner?" he again called out.

"I had that honor after my captain's death," I answered.

"Well, sir, I heard of your beautiful vessel, and it does credit to her builders; but I need her more than does King William, and shall take her; but should he desire her very much, he'll have to come and fight for her."

"I then knew why he hadn't fired on the craft—he didn't want to hurt her, so carried us by boarding."

"And did he treat you with cruelty, Captain Dent?" asked Lady Grace.

"Bless you, no, lady; he had our wounded looked after, sent them on board the lugger, which was leaking badly, and told me to head for the nearest port, which I did; but the craft sunk off shore a league, and we had to take to the boats."

"I heard of the affair; and, if St. Vane can retake the schooner for the king, he'll be knighted," said the earl.

"He won't do it, my lord, though he's got the nerve to do it, and I hope—"

"Sail ho!"

"Whereaway, lad?" cried the captain.

"Dead ahead, sir."

All saw the distant sail, and when it rose higher above the horizon, Captain Dent hailed the foretop:

"What do you make her, lad?"

All waited anxiously, and then came the answer:

"It is the Galley Slave, sir."

"The very craft we spoke of; he has doubled on us during the blow," said the captain, while the earl asked anxiously:

"Can there be no mistake, sir?"

The old seaman leveled his glass, and after a moment said slowly:

"We were driven off our course; he headed back for New York, and has either run away from, or—"

"Or what, Captain Dent?" asked Lady Kate.

"Or sunk St. Vane."

"You are sure it is the pirate schooner, captain?"

"I cannot mistake her, my lord; that is Kyd, the King of the Black Flag."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE COMBAT.

HAD any one doubted the belief of the cruiser's captain regarding the character of the strange sail, a glance at the crew would have confirmed the idea of their commander, for many of them had been with him when Kyd had wrested from him the beautiful cutter.

"There is no use running, my lord, from yonder craft, as you on the yacht found out; and especially with this old lubberly craft, that is only good to give and receive hard knocks," said the captain.

"All right; if we must fight we must, so there is an end of it; but I would it were under different circumstances," replied the earl, sadly.

"Yes, that is the schooner, uncle, so I may as well ask the captain to do what was done on the yacht," said Lady Grace, approaching the spot where the two stood.

"And that is, fair lady?" asked the captain.

"To haul down the British ensign and run up the Castle Cor flag."

"Hal! I had forgotten that ruse and whim of yours, Grace; bring up the colors, niece," said the earl, feeling once more a great weight removed from his mind.

The maiden descended into the cabin, but soon returned with a serious look upon her face, while she said:

"Uncle, the roll of Castle Cor flags were left upon the yacht."

"Too bad! too bad! Well, Captain Dent, what is to be done?"

"Fight it out, my lord; I hate to fire on that pretty schooner, for if I could retake her, I'd yet have the honor of taking her over to King Billy; but then I'll blow her out of the water, before that pack of fiends shall ever spring upon my deck again."

"And I'll aid you, captain, for I have not forgotten my early training in the army," replied the earl.

In the meantime the schooner had drawn much nearer, and was now plainly visible in the moonlight, and not a mile distant.

"I'll keep right on my course, my lord, and woe be to him if he attacks this old ironside with that pretty plaything, though I must admit she is as stanch as a line-of-battle ship."

The crew were then sent to quarters, the shot-stands placed near the guns, and filled, and the masts encircled by bristling cutlasses and boarding-pikes.

"Now, ladies, dear, you will have to go into the cabin, and lay low on the floor, for this will be no child's play, even if we do outnumber and outweigh yonder fellow," said Captain Dent, and reluctantly the countess and the two maidens went into the cabin, for they could not remain to see those they loved and respected exposed to such fearful danger.

"That man Kyd must be a remarkable person, captain, to possess the power he holds over his fellow-men," said the earl, who had just returned to the deck, armed with his sword, and a brace of the clumsy pistols of that age, yet they were serviceable if not handsome.

"He is a remarkable man, my lord—oh, my dear lady, have you returned to the deck?" and the captain turned to Grace.

"Yes; please let me remain until the first gun is fired, and then I will go below. You were speaking of the courage of The Kyd, I believe?"

"Yes, Grace, I was saying he wields a marvellous power over mankind, and possesses an indomitable courage, for he seems to lead his fearful life more from a love of danger than a desire for booty, as he will attack a vessel of war even, and one of double his strength," remarked the earl.

"Yes, uncle, it is the same courage that Lucifer possessed, and which enabled him to lead armies of angels from Heaven down to Hell," said Grace, with bitterness.

"God grant he lead no angels out of this ship; but if Kyd attacks us, this vessel will be a very hell with angels in it," remarked the captain, *sotto voce*, and then he ordered the helmsman to steer straight on his course, swerving not half a point.

The two vessels now were not more than two-thirds of a mile apart, and yet neither of them had fired a shot; but the crew of the cruiser were at quarters, and it was very evident that the schooner's men were ready for action.

"There is a flash!" cried the earl, suddenly.

"No, 'tis a battle-lantern seen through his open ports; he will board us, for that is his style, my lad."

"We'll give him a broadside before he does, captain."

"Oh, yes, my lord, a dozen of them if we can. Ho! at the guns there!"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Send a thirty-two into yonder craft."

"Ay, ay!" and a moment after the heavy gun boomed forth with a report that caused the cruiser to tremble, while the solid shot hurtled onward and struck the water just astern of the schooner.

"Too far aft; another one, and send it home!"

And again the thirty-two belched forth its messenger of death, and struck a few feet this

side of the schooner, sending the spray over her decks, and passing between her masts.

"You gave them a shower-bath that time, gunner; go ahead, for practice makes perfect, they say."

Again and again the heavy gun was fired, and around the schooner in all directions the shot struck, and over it, yet not a rope was cut, or a scar made on the tapering masts or graceful hull.

As soon as the firing commenced Lady Grace sunk down in the companionway unnoticed, and her determined pale face proved that she intended to remain there through all, if not discovered by her uncle and driven into the cabin.

"Stand by for a broadside!" suddenly shouted the old captain.

"Ay, ay, sir; all ready!" came from the officers at the guns.

"Helm a-starboard!"

"Starboard it is, sir," answered the helmsman.

"Steady as you are—steady!"

"Steady!" came in the cool tones of the men at the wheel.

"Give it to them!"

The cruiser's broadside went forth with a shock that made her hull tremble to the keel; but no crashing sounds followed, no shrieks of hard hit men followed, and it was plain that the guns had been fired a second too late, and had not sent the iron hail aboard of the schooner.

"At your guns there!" the ringing voice came from the schooner, and was distinctly heard on board the cruiser.

"Teach those lubbers how to aim a gun—fire!"

The white smoke of the cruiser's guns hung between the two vessels, hiding them from each other; but the well-trained gunners of the pirate sent their shots crashing through the high bulwarks, splintering the masts, tearing up the decks, and wringing howls of anguish from the wounded.

"Well done, ye red dogs! boarders ahoy!" came the same clear, commanding tones, and though the cruiser's men had rallied from the terrific shock given them, and sent their shots home now, the schooner shot out of the dense smoke, swept around like a regatta club boat turning a stake in a race, and was laid alongside of the cruiser with a skill that showed a master-hand at the helm, and an accuracy in the maneuver that could only come by long practice in just such wild scenes.

"Lively at your guns! charge to the muzzle! let 'em have it!" yelled Captain Dent, and then, as the schooner came gracefully alongside, and he saw that she had skillfully out-manuevered him, he shouted:

"Boarders repel boarders!"

"Quit your guns now! boarders here! follow me!" and with the bound of an athlete the schooner's captain sprung upon the cruiser's deck, sweeping up, with one curve of his huge cutlass, half a dozen pikes leveled at his heart.

He was the first man on the cruiser's deck, and the quarter of a minute went by before his men, held back by a roll of the schooner, could follow; and in that instant Lady Grace, crouching in the companionway, beheld his face, and with a groan of anguish let her head droop in her hands.

Then followed the rattling discharge of blunderbusses, muskets and pistols, the clash of steel, the cheers of the king's crew, the wild yells of the pirates, stern orders, cries of pain, and then in swarms the schooner's hounds poured upon the deck of the vessel of war, and the fight became general, savage, brutal.

Some had fallen between the surging hulls and were ground to atoms in a second; others had gained a footing on the cruiser, to fall back into the waters, raising the stump of an arm piteously, or a face slashed beyond human resemblance.

Others were cursing, some praying, still more shouting defiance, and thus the combat raged, while the moon looked calmly down upon the sickening scene, and yet with a sad, reproachful face at man's inhumanity to man.

With strange recklessness the pirate leader threw himself everywhere that the fight was thickest, his commanding voice urging his men on, and his cutlass falling unmercifully around him.

"Press them back! no mercy to the bloody pirates! hurl them into the sea!" cried Captain Dent, wielding his sword with deadly skill, while the Earl of Belmont was fighting like a tiger by his side.

"No quarter! they are but pirates! save the hangman trouble!" again shouted the cruiser's captain.

"Ha! old man, that is your cry, is it?" and the Pirate Chief sprung before him.

"Yes, no quarter to pirates!" yelled the captain.

"Then take what you would give!" and the heavy cutlass fell with crushing force upon the head of the poor captain, who, with a cheer to his men upon his lips, sunk dead upon the deck.

Paralyzed an instant by the fall of their brave old commander the cruiser's men hesitated, and fatal was their act, for, like an avalanche of

steel and fire, the pirate crew swept aft, carrying all opposition before them.

"Now at them! over them! strike off their pike heads with your cutlasses," and like a Hercules the Pirate Chief hurled men from his pathway as though they were mere children, and followed by his red devils, he swept aft, and all was lost.

"Mercy! quarter! quarter!"

The cries resounded upon all sides and came from the crew of the cruiser, for they had been cut down, routed, defeated upon their own deck, and by not more than half their number.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE BUCCANEER'S PRIZE.

"Who commands this vessel?" and the firing having ceased the buccaneer chief stood glancing around him with no more excitement than he would have shown under the most ordinary circumstances.

Out of the crowd a young man stepped forward and said:

"Since the captain is dead I am the ranking officer."

"How are you supplied with the munitions of war?"

"We have a full supply."

"Good! I need iron to get me gold. You have other things on board here that I need, or I would not have attacked you, for hard knocks are generally all we get out of a vessel-of-war. You captured, several days ago, a treasure ship bound for the Spanish main."

"Ha! how know you that, Sir Pirate?"

The chief smiled, but, making no reply, turned and walked aft, while his men were busy securing what booty they could, and stores and ammunition they needed.

Halting amidst the sickening scene of death and misery around him, and the moonlight fell full upon his face and form.

The latter was a model of manly beauty, tall, straight, broad-shouldered and as wiry as a tiger; the face was very dark, stern, and a long brown mustache drooped over the mouth, softening the scornful expression that rested there.

His eyes were large, and seemed to blaze in excitement and melt in repose, and could flash from sadness to intense anger in an instant.

His hair was worn long, dropping upon his broad shoulders, and a soft hat, in which was a sable plume, pinned in with a diamond dagger, shaded his haughty head.

He was dressed in buckskin boots with fancy tops, wore knee-breeches of red cloth, a black velvet jacket trimmed with gold lace, a blue scarf of silk net, and buckskin gloves, now blood-stained.

"Hullo, Marko! here's game, and she'll be mine if I fight for her," suddenly cried a voice aft, and then came in stern tones:

"Back, miscreant, or I'll sheathe my sword in your heart."

The words brought the pirate chief to himself, for he had been lost in reverie, and bounding aft to the quarter-deck, he beheld an elderly gentleman, standing sword in hand before the open companionway, in which crouched a feminine form.

It was the Earl of Belmont, and Lady Grace, and, confronting the nobleman, were three buccaneers, one of whom had spoken claiming a fair prize.

"I'll fight thee for her, old man," he said, coolly, raising his weapon and advancing.

"Hold! what means this outrage?" and the chief bounded forward.

"It means I've a prize, a fair petticoat, captain, and the old gent will not give her up, until I show him the temper of my steel."

"Great God! the Earl of Belmont!"

The cry came from the chief's lips, and he stepped quickly back, drawing his hat down, so as to the better conceal his battle-begrimed face.

"Ay, that am I, the Earl of Belmont; but who are you that calls me by name?"

"It matters not who I am, my lord; I expected not to see you on board this vessel, or would never have turned my guns upon her."

"Ha! have we then met before, and you have received favor at my hands, that you speak thus?"

"It matters not, my lord; but you are free to go on your way, without greater harm than has been already done, and I will order my men on board my vessel at once," and turning to the three who stood near, he said sternly:

"To the schooner, hounds, and mind you, carry nothing with you but the arms you brought."

"But, captain, I'll not give up yonder lovely prize," said the man who had before claimed Lady Grace.

The chief cast a glance at the shrinking form, and turned his face quickly away, while he said in ringing tones:

"Did you hear my order, sirrah?"

"I heard it, captain, but—"

"Do you intend to obey?"

"I will if I get the girl, but not unless."

With a cry like an enraged wild beast the chief sprang toward him, and his cutlass made one sweep through the air, and fell with terrific force upon the blade of the man who vainly tried to ward it off, for down upon the head it came, cleaving the skull in twain.

Not a sound escaped the lips of the mutineer, while his two companions, who had doggedly stood by as though to urge him on, fled for their lives.

"Galley Slaves, obey!" called the chief in his trumpet tones.

"Ay, ay, sir," was the answer, from half a hundred lips.

"Back to the schooner, at once! carry not a thing with you from this vessel! ready all to make sail!"

Instantly and quietly the crew obeyed, though some of them failed to drop the plunder they had secured.

Seeing this, the chief walked forward a few steps.

"Do you dare me, devils? I said take not a thing with you, more than you boarded with."

All were surprised; none more so than the cruiser's crew, and all eyes were turned upon the chief, while as each man of the schooner caught his burning gaze, he moved toward his own vessel.

"You will not tell me where we have met before, sir chief, for such I see you are; and why from your hands I receive this kindness?" asked the earl.

"It matters not! Earl of Belmont; I am what I am, no more," was the haughty reply, and the chief still kept his face from the moonlight, while: "Oh God! what a scene is this for me!" broke in a low tone of anguish, from the lips of the buccaneer leader.

And again the earl approached and said, kindly:

"Sir chief, myself and family owe much to you, more than we can ever repay; here, you are out of your sphere, so take my advice and give up this mad life you lead, and in me you will ever find a friend."

"Earl of Belmont, you speak idly; you mean well, but you know not what you say; there is no other life for me; away from scenes like the one just enacted on your deck, I would go mad with bitter thought."

"You are free to go, sir, and I regret the detention to your vessel."

"Mysterious man, from my inmost heart I thank you; but at least answer me one question—are you the man whom men call Kyd?"

"Yes, Earl of Belmont, I am *The Kyd*; ay, and worse."

He turned quickly away, sprung upon the bulwark and then into the ratlines, and said sternly:

"Let her fall off there!"

The two vessels swung quickly apart, and standing on the cruiser's deck, Lady Grace murmured in low, sobbing tones:

"The Witch said truly: *he is a pirate*."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

CAVANAUGH.

THE Governor's mansion of New York city, nearly two hundred years ago, was a grand old stone building, in the Dutch style of architecture, and, from being painted white, was called by the burghers *Der Vite Sals*, a name, which being interpreted means, "The White Hall."

The mansion was quite large, stood in a park, and upon a site which is now the Battery grounds.

Commanding extensive views across East river to the Long Island Heights, now Brooklyn, up the Hudson river, across to the Jersey shore, and down the beautiful harbor, the mansion was a most desirable abode in which to dwell, and neither the Earl of Belmont, nor any member of his family, regretted having given up Castle Cor in old Ireland, that

"Emerald gem on the breast of the sea."

Since his coming to New York, some months before, the Earl of Belmont had made a popular Governor, and his family were dearly loved by all who knew them; but yet there were those, among the prominent merchants, who said he was not energetic in freeing the coast of the terrible pirate Kyd, who each week was winning greater fame as a buccaneer of merciless humor, and who feared neither God, man nor the devil.

And yet the king's yacht, or cutter, known as the Bloodhound, was constantly cruising about the bay and coast, in search of the famous pirate, for her commander, Clement St. Vane, had sworn a solemn oath to yet bring Kyd to the gallows.

And knowing of this vow of Captain St. Vane, The Kyd had boldly sent him word that he would one day swing him to the yard-arm of his schooner, and sail past New York City with him there, and in broad daylight.

Such was the state of affairs shortly after the arrival of the Earl of Belmont in the Colonies, and, with a desperate pirate cruising off the coast, and sometimes boldly running up into the harbor, it was no wonder that the family in the White Hall were kept constantly in a state of excitement.

One pleasant afternoon, and near the sunset hour, Kate of Belmont sat alone in the private parlor of the mansion, and which looked out upon the lawn that sloped to the river bank.

Though growing more beautiful each day, there was yet a look of dreamy sadness ever

haunting her face in repose, showing that her thoughts were often roaming to scenes of the past.

The room was handsomely furnished, and a harp stood near where she half sat, half reclined, upon an easy lounge; but the harp-strings were unswept now, and silence brooded over all, for the Governor was visiting the forts, the Lady Lenore and Grace had gone for a horse-back ride with a young officer of the Governor's staff, and Captain Clement St. Vane, who was in port, thoroughly refitting his cutter to go again after the famous pirate, and Kate was left alone with her thoughts.

"Ah me, I could have mourned him dead a thousand times, with less grief than I feel now, knowing him to be what Grace has told me he is, and what I cannot but believe him to be."

"And men seek my heart in love, and my father urges that I give my hand: alas! the hand must go without the heart, for that is buried in the grave of the past; would to God he also slept in his grave, for how will all this end?"

"Ay, how can it end, but in death?"

She started, a half-cry upon her lips, as suddenly a shadow fell into the open window, and she beheld a tall form standing within three feet of her.

She would have fled, but she had not the strength; cry out she dare not, and, white as a corpse she sunk back, one word upon her lips:

"Cavanaugh."

There he stood before her; magnificent, dignified, and with his sad, impassioned eyes fixed upon her, but greatly changed from the youth of two years before, and after a moment he said in his deep, earnest voice:

"Lady Kate of Belmont, have you forgotten me quite?"

"No, I remember you but too well."

"And is this your welcome to an old friend?"

"Would you ask for a different greeting when you know what you are?"

He started visibly, but replied in a light tone:

"I am a sailor, a wanderer over many seas, and one who, tired of the life I lead, would seek some fond heart, and have it for all my own: do you know of such an one that could love Kenton Cavanaugh, Lady Grace, in return for the idolatrous love he would give her?"

"Yes, the Kenton Cavanaugh of long ago, a woman might love; but not the mockery of what he once was, not what he is to-day, could a pure-hearted maiden regard with affection," she answered firmly.

He started again, and walked to and fro for an instant: then he said quickly:

"Do you know me as I am, Kate of Belmont?"

"Yes."

"My name?"

"I dare not utter it; for it is one that mothers frighten their naughty children with: it is a name I shuddered at hearing before I left Castle Cor: it is a name branded with infamy and red with blood: yes, Kenton Cavanaugh, I know you now, as *Kyd, the King of the Black Flag*."

His face was like marble, but he said calmly:

"And thus knowing me you could never love me?"

"Never!"

"Once, you let me look into your eyes, the windows of your soul, Kate of Belmont, and see down into your inmost heart, and what do you think I saw there?"

"Your image, as it was," she said, in a low tone.

"Yes, and you say it was not indelibly engraved there; that time has faded it?"

"No, it is not there, but an eternity of time would not have erased what thy crimes have done."

"Then my image is not in your heart, Kate of Belmont?"

"No."

"Whose is?" and he asked the question with a jealous flash in his eyes.

"A grave only is there; the grave of my buried love for the Kenton of the past."

"Kate of Belmont, farewell; to-day we part forever."

"It was madness for me to come here and see you, but I had not the strength to resist."

"I am all that is bad, far worse than you can ever know; but there is one thing that is pure and good in me, and that is my love for you."

"Behold yonder brig lying at anchor under the very guns of the Bloodhound; that vessel I captured last night, and my crew are on board of her, while my schooner, the Galley Slave, awaits me two leagues away."

"I came here to see you, to look once more in your face, in your eyes, and see if your love for me, as mine for you, had remained green."

"Alas! you cast me off, and I do not blame you, for what pure woman could love such as I? And now I bid you farewell."

"But mark my words, Lady Kate of Castle Cor, from this day I sink in oblivion the past, and revel only in the present, hoping nothing for the future, and so merciless shall I be that the whole world shall tremble at the name of Kyd; heed my prophecy."

He turned on his heel and strode away across the lawn, while tremblingly fascinated she remained gazing after him, saw him enter a boat

in waiting, and row out to the brigantine, which spread its white sails and flew down the bay. She watched his tall form standing at the helm, watched until she could see it no longer, and then with a moan of anguish wrung from her inmost heart, fell prone on the floor in a deathlike swoon.

CHAPTER XXXVII CONCLUSION.

How Kyd kept his threat and fulfilled his prophecy made to Kate of Belmont, and became indeed the merciless King of the Black Flag, the reader of history already knows, as he does also that the swift-sailing Galley Slave was hunted to its death at last, by the Bloodhound, and her chief captured, sent to England, tried and sentenced to death on the gallows, expiating his many crimes with his life.

But history does not fully make known that Kate of Belmont never married, but, after Kyd's death, took the veil as a nun, while her cousin, Lady Grace, who also loved the corsair chief, tore his image from her heart, and became the wife of Clement St. Vane.

Of Lord Gerald, the false heir to the earldom and Castle Cor, and Lord Manly Meredith, little is known regarding their fate; yet certain it is, that neither of them inherited the titles and estates they hoped for, being cut off in their early manhood by Death's relentless clutch, and through the vile plottings of Zebel the Witch, who was none other than Jule the Gipsy, the poor girl whom Hurler of the Red Hand had dragged down to ruin, and then, as he believed, had hurled into the sea to die, but who had miraculously escaped death, and discovering that her son had not died on that fatal night of departure from Castle Death, had made him the blood-stained, crime-haunted Captain Kyd, whose name will go down branded with infamy to the end of time.

Kind reader, my story has ended; but if I have interested you sufficiently in Captain Kyd, and other characters that have figured in my historical romance, and you care to follow the career of the noted corsair on the American coast; the weird, mysterious life of Zebel the Witch; the loves of Kate of Castle Cor, and Grace of Greyhurst; the hates of Lord Gerald and Lord Meredith, all will be told in the novel soon to follow:

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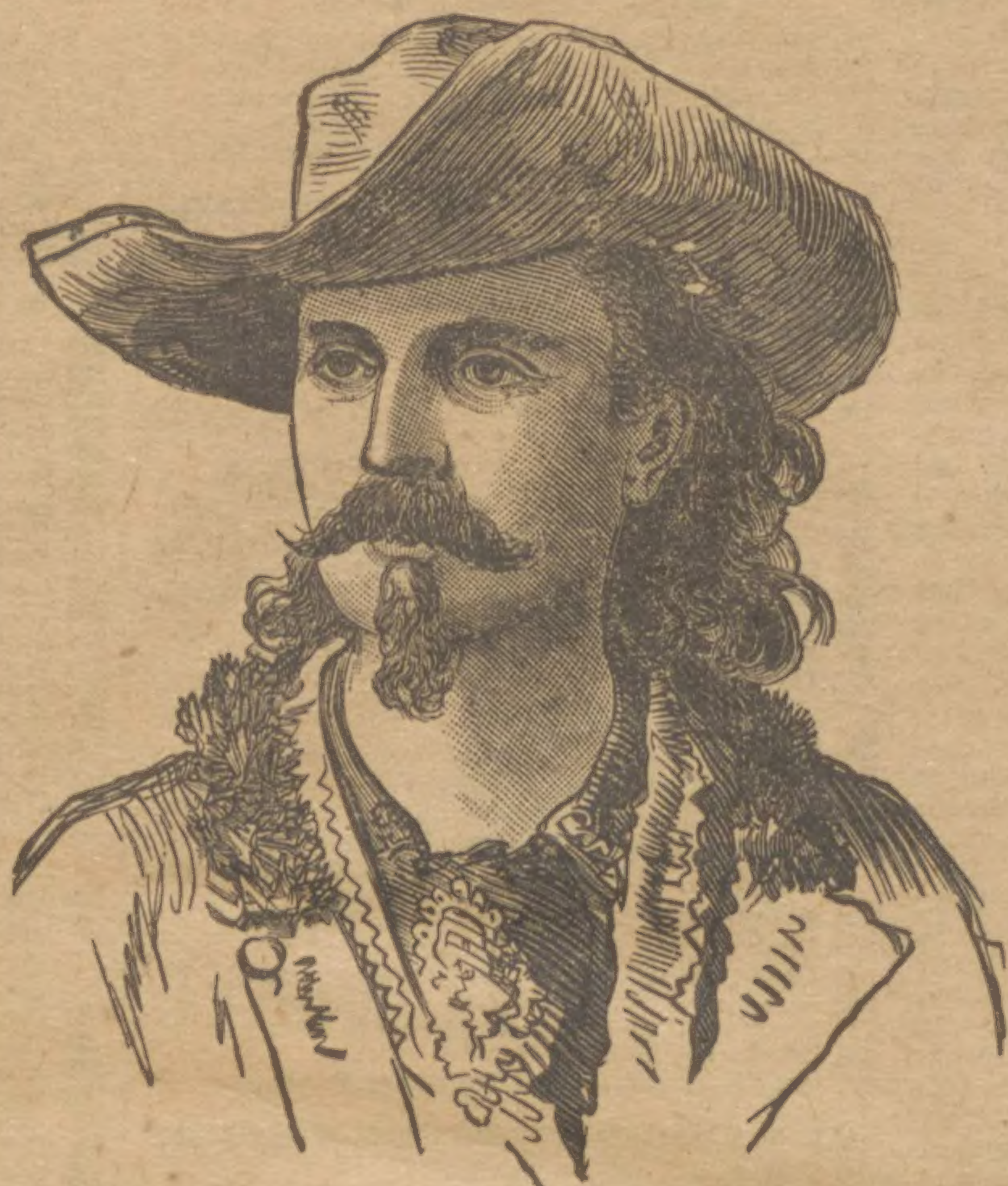
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